

**Enacting Critical Feminist Librarianship: Examining LIS Book Clubs as a Means of  
Collaborative Inquiry and Professional Value Formation**

**A MASTER'S THESIS**

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

December 2018

by Laila Brown

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Vanessa Irvin, Chair

Dr. Rich Gazan

Dr. Noriko Asato

### **Acknowledgements**

To my Thesis Chair, Dr. V., my most sincere thanks. Thank you for your wisdom and wit, your encouragement and generosity. I couldn't be more grateful.

To my Committee Members, Dr. Rich Gazan and Dr. Noriko Asato, thank you for your insight and support. I have immensely enjoyed working with you.

To my study participants, thank you for your conversation, your time, and your energy. Because of you, I got to tell everyone who asked what I was doing for my thesis research that I was reading fun books and spending time with friends.

*What I enjoy in a narrative is not directly its content or even its structure, but rather the abrasions I impose upon the fine surface: I read on, I skip, I look up, I dip in again. Which has nothing to do with the deep laceration the text of bliss inflicts upon language itself, and not upon the simple temporality of reading.*

- Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b>	5
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	6
Research Questions	12
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review</b>	14
Reader Response Theory	15
Concepts in Context: Book Clubs	20
Book Club Studies in LIS	27
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology and Design</b>	32
Data Collection and Analysis	33
Challenges in Study Design	41
A Note on Writing Style	43
Aim of Research	43
<b>Chapter 4: Data and Analysis</b>	45
Research Question 1: Community Formation   In participating in the BBW Book Club and/or the LIS Book Club, in what ways do members feel that they gain a supportive network of LIS peers?	45
Adaptation of an Alternative LIS Social Structure	46
Personal Narratives and the Perpetuation of an Ethic of Care	49
Communities of Practice, Communities of Praxis	53
Research Question 2: Complementing Classroom Pedagogy   How does book club discussion complement and/or supplement LIS classroom pedagogy? Does book club participation contribute to member professional learning and knowledge?	55
Learning Through Textual Content and Discussion	56
Learning Through a Challenge to Define One's Ethical Positions	60
Learning Through Book Club Design	65
Research Question 3: LIS Identity Formation   To what degree does LIS-focused/intentioned book club membership contribute to formation of participants' professional identity?	67
A Feminist Diversity Ethic	71
Critical Librarianship: Rejection of the Comfort Zone	80
Progressivism and Critical Librarianship	86
Reflexive Inquiry	89
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion</b>	92
<b>References</b>	100
<b>Appendix I – Book Club Annotated Bibliography</b>	105



## **Abstract**

This master's thesis presents an examination of the meaning and significance of dialogic exploration of texts in book club settings among Library and Information Science (LIS) master's students at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM). I conducted participant observation among the feminist Books by Women Book Club and the progressive and diversity-ethic oriented UHM LIS Book Club and interviewed several members in each group. In this study, I sought to achieve an understanding of the creative, constitutive, and generative processes of these two book clubs. This study illuminates three essential elements of student participation in these value-driven and library and information science-intentioned book clubs. Firstly, these book clubs function as communities of practice that offer emerging LIS professionals networks of interpersonal and professional support. Secondly, these book clubs complement and supplement LIS classroom pedagogy, thereby contributing to member professional learning and knowledge. Thirdly, these book clubs contribute to the development of members' personal and professional values and philosophy. Through focused exploration of textual content espousing the values upon which these book clubs are predicated—namely feminism and critical librarianship—these book clubs enable student participants to explore, negotiate, and enact such values in the book clubs, and to continue to do so in their future professional practice.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Books are powerful. And so too—my study participants will tell you—are book clubs. When one reads, one is aggregating knowledge, interpreting symbols, impressing meaning upon the text; and because of these entangled, simultaneous creative processes, reading is an act of sculpting the mind. When, after reading, one carries their thoughts and newly engendered associations into conversation with another person, one is prolonging the reading experience, infusing it with new meanings supplied by the other, further sculpting one's mind. Books and book clubs can be addictive because they empower readers who engage in discourse with and about books to shape their thinking in ways they find satisfying.

Trott, Beard, and Thi-Beard affirm that “reading a book is no mere act of consumption. It is a constitutive act, bound to other acts like writing, conversation, dress, travel, art, labor, and other acts that constitute the self” (2008, p. 333). Reading is, furthermore, a generative act. My research demonstrates an insatiable desire among readers to generate conversation about their reading: to ruminate on what they loved of the text and to decry what they disliked, to perceive the text through another's perspective, to continue the dialogue even after they have reached the book's final page and closed the cover. Trott et al. confirm that “we need to recognize that readers select texts that cultivate their identities: their places in various social institutions and in various ideological formations” (p. 333). Indeed, readers who engage in intentional reading practices employ text to gain knowledge and situate their learning within a broader realm of knowing. Deliberate exploration of text, especially when bound to the critical inquiry that can occur in book clubs, influences readers' values, philosophy, and ultimately, identity.

This master's thesis presents an examination of the meaning and significance of dialogic exploration of texts in book club settings among Library and Information Science (LIS) master's

degree students at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM). The two book clubs this study focuses on—the Books by Women Book Club and the UHM LIS Book Club—position themselves as a feminist and as a progressive and diversity-ethic book club, respectively. In this study, I sought to achieve an understanding of the creative, constitutive, and generative processes of these two book clubs. Through my research, I came to understand three essential elements of student participation in these value-driven and LIS-intentioned book clubs. Firstly, these book clubs functioned as communities of practice that offer emerging LIS professionals networks of interpersonal and professional support. Secondly, these book clubs complemented and supplemented LIS classroom pedagogy, thereby contributing to member professional learning and knowledge. Thirdly, these book clubs contributed to the development of members' personal and professional values and philosophy, and therefore, their professional identities. Through focused exploration of textual content espousing the values upon which these book clubs are predicated—namely feminism and critical librarianship—these book clubs enabled student participants to explore, negotiate, and enact such values in the book club and within their emerging identities as professional librarians.

Both book clubs were hosted by enrolled students in the UHM LIS Program. The first of the two book club communities is the “Books by Women Book Club,” named after the group's mandate that all texts selected for book club reading be authored by women. For brevity's sake, I will henceforth refer to the Books by Women Book Club with the acronym, “BBW.” BBW began meeting in the spring 2017 semester at UHM, the semester at the beginning of which all members matriculated into the LIS Program. At the advent of my research in the spring 2018 semester, BBW was well established and had been meeting regularly for one year. This group was comprised of a stable core of about four participants (besides myself). Its key characteristic



was its feminist framework. While the group employed no formalized working definition of feminism, its principles and practices aligned with intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 1989) and were established in recognition of the continuing systematic marginalization and oppression of women. In their own way, to counteract the publishing and book reviewing disparity between men and women (King & Clark, 2018), BBW members sought to support women writers, increase their own exposure to women-authored texts, and increase awareness of the inequitable status quo of the publishing industry by privileging women-authored texts in their book club selections. Beyond this single firm criterion for book selection, BBW texts were deliberately inclusive: members selected books of a variety of genres and viewpoints written by and about women of various cultures and ethnicities, nationalities and places of residence, gender identities, sexual orientations, ages, socioeconomic statuses, religious identities, backgrounds, and experiences. As Accardi (2013) notes:

knowledge produced in the male-dominated culture is traditionally privileged as valid, true, and important, so an emphasis on legitimizing other forms of knowledge, especially the knowledge of oppressed classes, is a feminist act. (p. 38)

BBW members took turns choosing texts to read on a rotating basis, and met roughly every two months, though generally a bit more frequently during the summer break between spring and fall school semesters. While conversation during book club meetings would largely focus on that meeting's chosen book, participants would also inevitably discuss their experiences in the LIS program and related arenas such as paraprofessional library jobs, internships, volunteer positions, and other career advancement opportunities. As a participant in this book club since its inception, it was clear to me early on that this group functioned as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in which participants learned about themselves and one another

through collaborative discussion of texts. My subsequent research would go on to reveal that the texts serve as entry points for discussion and development of personal convictions and professional philosophies of librarianship.

The second book club was a joint initiative of two LIS student groups: The UHM LIS Diversity Council and a student chapter of the Progressive Librarians Guild. This book club, called the UHM LIS Book Club —henceforth referred to as the “LIS Book Club”—was open to the entire UHM LIS community, and aimed to use books and discussion to foster the UHM LIS community and to inspire discussion that connects LIS to diversity and social justice. While most of the BBW texts were novels that could be considered pleasure reading, the LIS Book Club texts tended to be more academic in nature, and more visibly related to LIS.

Interestingly, at the beginning of my research, the two book clubs existed as entirely separate entities, each with its own membership, agenda, and practices. As my data collection progressed, however, I observed an increasing cross-membership between the two book clubs. At the end of my data collection, more of my study participants were members of both book clubs than of exclusively one or the other.

One of the key characteristics of both book clubs is that they were entirely elective. Members read and met of their own volition; a testament to members’ commitment to learning and to the enduring appeal of the book clubs themselves. Importantly, even as cross-membership increased, each club maintained its unique atmosphere and book selection and meeting practices. I did, however, observe a confluence of values. As my data collection progressed through time, BBW seemed to adopt a sharper focus on diversity and progressivism, and in parallel fashion, the LIS Book Club’s embrace of a feminist paradigm became increasingly discernable. In the illustrative examples included in the following sections, I will differentiate between BBW and

the LIS Book Club, but will impress upon readers that individual and group values revealed themselves in tandem among the two book clubs. In addition to feminism, progressivism, and a diversity ethic, the two groups displayed and embraced the values and practice of empathy, critical librarianship, reflexivity, and a readiness to step outside their comfort zones.

Though book clubs comprised of individuals of a common profession have long been the subject of intensive research, precious few studies have focused on book clubs comprised of librarians and/or information professionals or LIS students. Relevant research demonstrates that book clubs offer their participants a range of benefits; I sought to understand how emerging LIS professionals benefit from participation in book clubs with their peers.

The BBW Book Club and the LIS Book Club provided LIS students with rich contexts for learning, community building, identity formation, and personal and professional philosophy synthesis. The educational journey through the UHM LIS Program is a pivotal time in the professional lives of the student body studying to become LIS professionals. While in the LIS Program, students exist transitionally between the roles of the LIS paraprofessional and the professional librarian.

Between the pedagogy of the LIS curriculum and working in paraprofessional positions, students are deeply immersed in the theory of the field without having achieved professional status. Within this liminal state, students are often just beginning to formulate and contextualize their professional philosophies. The experiences students have in the LIS Program have the potential to play an influential role in shaping their professional convictions and philosophies, and thus can reverberate throughout their subsequent careers.

BBW and the LIS Book Club are replete with meaning and significance for their participants, which directly impacts their professional philosophies and identity construction.

The book clubs functioned as communities of practice which comprise spaces for interpersonal interaction and learning for individuals at the cusp of their LIS careers. The groups serve as comfortable spaces at the intersection of the extracurricular and the co-curricular—the personal/interpersonal and the professional—in which students have the flexibility to extrapolate their learning from the LIS Program and apply it to book club texts and vice versa. Then, in making connections between the texts, LIS education, and their lived experiences, participants challenge one another to form and re-form new conceptualizations of meaning through dialogic collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978) where intersectional conversations contributed value to members' professional identity formation.

This kind of sense-making reader response is an iterative process in which learning from one's own and others' interpretation of text, and from one's own and others' life experiences, influences and continually re-forms one's beliefs and perspectives (Iser, 1980). Membership in BBW and/or the UHM LIS book clubs contributed to the development of members' personal and professional LIS philosophies and identities. Finally, books clubs that espouse social stances such as feminism, diversity, and progressivism will self-select for members who identify with such values, but the constitutive processes that occur within actual book club discourse strengthens and inspires commitment to such espoused values.

In initial exploration of these ideas, and having grounded my preliminary thoughts within my own lived experience as a member of BBW in the year preceding my research, my research questions began to coalesce around three central ideas:

## Research Questions

1. In considering how the book clubs may encourage **community formation** among participants, I asked: *In participating in the BBW Book Club and/or the LIS Book Club, in what ways do members feel that they gain a supportive network of LIS peers?*
2. In considering **professional knowledge formation**, I asked: *How does book club discussion complement and/or supplement LIS classroom pedagogy? Does book club participation contribute to member professional learning and knowledge?*
3. And finally, in exploration of **professional identity formation** among book club members, I asked: *To what degree does identification as a member of a book club with certain values engender and/or reinforce personal and professional identification with those values? To what degree does LIS-focused/intentioned book club membership contribute to formation of participants' professional identity?*

We know that educator book clubs inspire great benefit for their participants (Kooy, 2006; Fajardo, 2010; Beach and Yussen, 2011, etc.), and specifically for LIS professionals, who are positioned as specialists engaged in various ways with the act of reading in the public sphere (Morris et al., 2006; Irvin Morris, 2012). Thus, I felt it vital to learn more profoundly what benefit(s) librarians derive from book club experiences that enhance their professional philosophy, practice, and identity (Irvin Morris, 2012). My research questions were intended to further research around LIS reader response within book club communities of practice. In the following pages, I will illustrate how LIS students' participation in book clubs had salient implications on their graduate level learning by fostering community, complementing curricula,

and enriching student educational experience, which in turn, influenced the development of professional philosophy and identity of these emerging LIS professionals.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

I approach the dialogic exploration of text in the social sphere—specifically in book clubs—through a social constructivist framework. Social constructivism is primarily concerned with the construction of meaning by individuals and groups. It is a theory of relativism, which holds that all meaning and knowledge are human constructions, meaning that objective truth is an impossibility. Au (1998) explicates that in the social constructivist framework, “communication or discourse processes are compared to processes of building, and generative acts” (p. 300). The sources I exhibit in this literature review explore this concept and illuminate the three-dimensional interaction between text, reader, and group. I illustrate this relationship by first establishing a reader response theory and social constructivist framework through examination of works by Rosenblatt (1938), Iser (1980), Vygotsky (1978), and Au (1998).

I then move to an exploration of reading as a social act, most fluently explicated by Pradl (1996) and Rainey (2017). I investigate this concept within the context of book clubs through the works of Childress and N. Friedkin (2012), Smith (1996), Beach and Yussen (2011), Polleck (2010 and 2011), and Kooy (2006). Finally, I examine the treatment of book clubs and reading by the LIS discipline, particularly citing works by Morris et al. (2006), LaGarde and Winner (2012), and Irvin Morris (2012).

I aim to show that the dialogic sharing of individual reader response of pre-professional librarians within a group context (as a community of practice) in discussion of literature creates a symposium of socio-professional ideas, which helps participants both deepen their understanding of what they read and situate their responses to literature within a larger social context of librarianship. In these ways, the collaboratively dynamic nature of literary discussion has transformative power for individuals and vast applications for the field of library and information

science. In this vein, the conceptual framework for this research is structured around the following concepts: reader response, reading as a social act, and book clubs within an LIS context.

### **Reader Response Theory**

Any discussion of the meaning and significance of book clubs would be incomplete, if not unfounded, without paying homage to Louise Rosenblatt's conception of reader response theory. In her seminal work, *Literature as Exploration* (1938) Rosenblatt establishes that readers engage in a transaction with text, in which their interpretation of the text is informed by their personal experiences and philosophies, along with any attendant anxieties and aspirations. According to Rosenblatt, it is through this interaction between reader and text that meaning is engendered; thus, every reader of a text will generate their own unique meaning from that text (1938). She states that "there is no such thing as a generic reader or a generic literary work; there are only the potential millions of individual readers or the potential millions of individual literary works. A novel or a poem or a play remains merely ink spots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 24).

Rosenblatt's theories about transactional reading, efferent and aesthetic reading experiences, and selective attention among reading audiences have been widely influential in literature studies, education, and library science, and provide the foundations of much subsequent research on the experience of reading. In the foreword to the fifth edition of *Literature as Exploration*, Wayne-Booth asks, "how many other critical works first published in the late thirties have extended themselves, like this one, to five editions, proving themselves relevant to decade after decade of critical and pedagogical revolution? ... [Rosenblatt] has



probably influenced more teachers in their ways of dealing with literature than any other critic” (1995, p. vii). Rosenblatt’s reader response framework is simply requisite for an understanding of the interactive influence of reading texts with others.

Iser’s notions, expressed in his work, *The Act of Reading* (1980), complement Rosenblatt’s. He asserts that there exists between reader and text a dynamic relationship that shifts and changes as the reading process progresses. He says, of this process:

The instructions provided [by the text] stimulate mental images, which animate what is linguistically implied, though not said. A sequence of mental images is bound to arise during the reading process, as new instructions have continually to be accommodated, resulting not only in the replacement of images formed but also in a shifting position of the vantage point, which differentiates the attitudes to be adopted in the process of image building. Thus the vantage point of the reader and the meeting place of perspectives become interrelated during the ideational activity and so draw the reader inescapably into the world of the text (p. 36).

This is a world that, in many respects, Rosenblatt and Iser would argue, the reader creates for oneself. Thus, reading text presents an opportunity for exploration of the internal self. If we extend this concept into the social, interpersonal realm, we see that when we engage others in conversation about text, we can explore our personal responses to literature in the context of the lived experiences and philosophies of others, in addition to our own.

Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (1978), when applied to Rosenblatt’s reader response concepts, provides additional theoretical foundation to explain how group discussions of literature, in which individuals share their unique transactional experiences with text, provide new insights to participating individuals and ultimately propel them to deeper, more dynamic

understandings of text and self. In one of his most influential works of developmental psychology, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (1978), Vygotsky presents the “zone of proximal development”, which he defines as the space between one’s actual developmental level (ability to independently problem-solve) and one’s potential developmental level (ability to problem-solve with guidance from or collaboration with a more capable other) (1978, p. 86). Essentially, Vygotsky puts forth that children advance developmentally through the reception of help and guidance from others. He positions learning as a social act, prompted and encouraged by watching and doing with others.

When applied to reader response theory, the zone of proximal development exists between initial individual perceptions of a text and collaborative group discussion of it. It follows that social constructivist research on literacy practices focuses on the teacher-learner dynamic, in which the former mediates the experience of the latter. Book clubs construct a situation in which all members may potentially occupy both the teacher and the learner role at once, simultaneously traversing and helping others across the zone of proximal development to arrive at new understandings of literature through discussion. The primary flaws in Vygotsky’s work are that he presents virtually no raw data and his descriptions and summaries of experiments remain rather general. Despite these shortcomings, his demonstrations nevertheless provide the foundation for our contemporary understanding of human learning and supply theoretical explanation for the processes of learning among book club members.

Both Rosenblatt’s and Vygotsky’s works are best understood through the framework of social constructivism, a school of thought which holds that meaning and knowledge are never objectively true, but are instead constructed by human individuals and groups. In her theoretical review, “Social Constructivism and the School Literacy Learning of Students of Diverse

Backgrounds,” Au (1998) provides an in-depth analysis of social constructivism and its role in literacy education. Au argues that the largely “mainstream” conception of social constructivism held by educators and school systems contributes to a gap in literacy achievement among students (p. 298). She puts forth that this gap could be closed with culturally literate consideration of ethnicity, primary language, and social class—factors which she establishes as lacking in curricula and educator consciousness (Au, 1998).

Au explains that in social constructivism as it applies to literacy theory, “the emphasis is on the process of knowledge construction by the social group and the intersubjectivity established through the interactions of the group” (p. 300). While attributing general success of educators in literacy education to adoption of a social constructivist framework, she argues that to reap the full gamut of benefits that this school of thought offers, educators must do more: they must acknowledge a more complete range of diversity of student experience, as the lived experiences of students influence the ways in which they learn. Au’s claims regarding student background as a factor influencing learning mirror Rosenblatt’s reader response theory. Both authors affirm the impossibility of separating individual experience and perspective from literacy education and experience with text, respectively. In an extension of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, Au shows that when students share their own personal narratives and are exposed to the personal narratives of others, participants can more fully understand the material they collaboratively address, as well as gain a deeper understanding of themselves and one another. Strengths of Au’s argument include: 1) clear exhibition of how a more complete, culturally literate social constructivist framework among educators would enrich student experience; and 2) provision of suggestions for realistic action that educators can implement in their classrooms to embody such a framework.

With working knowledge of Rosenblatt's reader response theory, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, and Au's social constructivism in literacy theory, we can conceive of the act of reading as an act of meaning and knowledge construction, and we can further understand the action of collaborative discussion of text among individuals as a force that, in turn, generates additional meaning and knowledge among readers.

### **Reading as a Fundamentally Social Act**

Together, Pradl (1996) and Rainey (2017) bring the theoretical background established collectively by Rosenblatt, Iser, Vygotsky, and Au to life. Both authors, in their exploration of reading in an academic context, lay groundwork for understanding reading as a fundamentally social act. While, as Rosenblatt asserts, reading can be an "intensely personal" experience (1960, p. 310), it is when literacy practice is conducted in the social sphere, Pradl and Rainey show, that readers often feel they reach new heights of understanding and discovery. In his account of his efforts to teach literature in as open and democratic a fashion as possible, Pradl encourages negotiation and renegotiation of texts among students in class discussions, and eschews the top-down model of teaching in which an instructor imposes meaning or informs students of the "correct" interpretation of a text. Rather than working towards a single, shared interpretation of a text, Pradl recognizes (and expects) heterogeneous responses to a single text among his students. This expectation suggests a social constructivist framework informed by Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, in which readers learn from the meaning constructions of others. Pradl's aim of encouraging differing individual responses to literature acknowledges the mosaic quality of literary discussion, in which individual opinions coalesce and contradict to create a more energized symposium of ideas.

Rainey's (2017) empirical study of the practices of ten university literary theorists and researchers of literary studies illuminates the common conception among the group of reading as a fundamentally social pursuit. Rainey audiotaped interviews with each of the theorists and researchers and then conducted comparative analysis of data to ultimately identify the shared understanding among study participants that text-based inquiry ought to be situated within the larger academic community. Rainey additionally identified a pattern of thinking about literary investigation as multifaceted and demanding the effort of many contributors. Similarly, to Pradl's views, Rainey's study reflects an understanding of the social nature of reading and the conception that collaboration allows for enhanced insight and formation of connections in interpretation of literary works. This understanding of reading as a social act seems to motivate the formation and longevity of book clubs, where the practices of reading individually and then collaboratively are enacted.

### **Concepts in Context: Book Clubs**

Childress and Friedkin's empirical study (2012) examines the cultural reception of texts amongst eighteen naturally occurring book clubs in the U.S. through a multilevel statistical modeling framework. Their study demonstrates, on a basic level, that individual reader response is changed and made more dynamic when literature is discussed in groups. The authors, who assigned all participating clubs Cornelia Nixon's novel *Jarrettsville* (2009) to read and discuss, hypothesized that group members would enter discussion with differing opinions about the text, and emerge from discussion with different viewpoints on the book than they initially had. The authors triangulated findings through collection of "before" and "after" reading surveys, audio recordings of group discussions, and field notes from participant observation in book club

meetings. Findings support their hypothesis: book club meetings did generate significant shifts in individual positions towards the book pre- and post-discussion. This study is particularly strong because of the large sample size of book groups and the multiple research methods the authors employed to validate their findings. This study contributes to the literature demonstrating the social construction of meaning and evaluation prompted by group discussion of literature. Findings further illuminate how social structure, individual readings, and interaction in groups intersect to influence an individual reader's perceptions of a novel.

Smith's (1996) study advances the findings of Childress and Friedkin's research by illustrating exactly how the processes of social constructivism play out in book clubs. While Childress and Friedkin (2012) address the "whether or not" questions, Smith (1996) addresses the "how" questions. Smith's primary research goal was to determine what book club members value most about their book club interactions. Smith recorded two meetings each of two book clubs and conducted interviews with six book club members from one group and three from the other. Content analysis of the recorded transcripts and interviews revealed that book club members primarily value the social aspects of the club, equality among members, and the perceived spirit of cooperation. In terms of the "social aspects" of the book clubs, Smith finds that book club texts provide a vehicle through which members contribute personal histories and ideologies to group discussion. Smith attests that study participants used their own life experiences as a source of knowledge with great frequency (27.5% of the total number of informative statements) in their discussion of literature (p. 183). One participant explains about others in the group: "I get to see the perspectives they might take on life's events within the book and then relate them to their own lives" (p. 182). In a revealing excerpt from a transcript, four book club members attempt to express their thoughts on a character. The exchange occurs in

twelve steps between four members, where none says more than a fragment of a sentence. These fragmentary statements, while messy on their own, ultimately do form a complete, coherent thought—one, it seems, that participants could only arrive at together. Contrastingly, a more rigid structure of a traditional classroom discussion, Smith argues, would allow for nothing like this, but instead would demand fully-formed thoughts and speaking of only one person at a time.

Smith contrasts his findings with those of a study on patterns of discourse in secondary school classes done by Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith (1995), to illustrate how discourse in the book clubs emphasized interaction and equal participation among all members, as well as sharing of personal experiences, to a much greater degree than classroom discussions. Smith argues that book club interactions are more successful than classroom discussions at providing engaging learning opportunities. He attributes this success to the dynamic nature of the book club discussions, which allow members to form thoughts spontaneously, creatively, and collaboratively. Smith suggests a model like that adopted by Pradl (1996) in his professional practice, whereby literature teachers decentralize classroom literature discussions, moving away from a lecture model and towards a model predicated on book club dialogue to enrich their students' experiences of literature discussion. Smith's book club model emphasizes the essential role of social construction of meaning in enhancing individual understandings of text. With Childress and Friedkin's (2012) study, we see that book club discussions do in fact change participant's experience of text, and with Smith's (1996) study, we begin to understand the mechanisms at work accomplishing such change.

In "Practices of Productive Adult Book Clubs," Beach and Yussen seek to identify factors that contribute to the productive and enduring nature of two separate adult book clubs that had been meeting consistently over the course of many years. This study is like Smith's in

that it aims to uncover what book club interactions members find enriching to their lives. It is also like Smith's study in terms of the relatively small sample size of book clubs studied (two in each case). Where such a limited sample might in some cases detract from the validity of the studies, in these two examples it seems instead to have allowed in-depth content analysis of interviews and near-ethnographic study of the book club sessions, leading arguably to richer, more valuable insight on the process-oriented questions of the researchers. Through analysis of recorded book club meetings and phone interviews with participants, Beach and Yussen come to attribute book club success to a more precise angle of reader response theory than many contemporary studies: namely the role of professional experience and educational background in informing an individual's response to a text.

In the interviews, book club members attest to considering their fellow members' professional and educational paradigms as a part of their reading experience as they formulate questions and topics for discussion. Such a response suggests that the social dynamics of reading occur even before an individual reader interacts with others (Iser, 1980). Book club members correspondingly state that their personal conceptions of each text are informed by their professional and educational background. Though the scope of this study is limited in its inclusion of only professionals with graduate degrees, the authors nevertheless effectively present evidence of one significant dimension influencing individuals' reader response and explore it within a book club social setting to illuminate the diversity of knowledge individuals can contribute to enhance group understandings of literature.

Polleck, in her two studies of book clubs composed of high school girls, advances reader response theory in the social realm by demonstrating how book club interactions influence not only members' conceptions of their shared readings (as Childress and Friedkin, 2012, Smith,



1996, and Beach and Yussen, 2011 show), but also contribute transcendently to identity formation among members. Polleck (2010)—again through a social constructivist framework—demonstrates the transformative nature of book clubs and their positive effects on social, emotional, and academic development among teenage girls. She uses Rosenblatt’s theory of reader response to argue that within the book clubs, the experience of everyone is twofold: first, each reader engages in transaction with text, at once efferently constructing meaning, and aesthetically connecting their own lives to the text. Second, collaborative discussion of each reader’s response to the texts catalyzes a transformation in which each reader comes to contextualize their own individual response within a larger social dimension. Through a sharing of personal experience with the group, participants work to negotiate new meanings from the text while simultaneously grounding them within their internal and social worlds.

Polleck asserts that beyond providing new understandings of the text, discussion of literature transforms participants by providing them with enhanced cognitive, social, and emotional abilities, which she says are especially crucial for adolescent females. Additionally, Polleck, as organizer of the book clubs, notes that she allows the participants full agency in conducting book club meetings, only answering questions when directly asked. Here she actualizes Pradl’s (1996) democratic teaching style in which students have agency to speak, think, and work collaboratively. Her findings demonstrate just how enriching this model of teaching (and learning) can be.

“Adolescent Literature Book Clubs: A Forum for Cultivation of Peer Relationships with Urban Adolescent Females” (2011) is Polleck’s second study of adolescent literature book clubs, in which she explores the processes of book club discussions in shaping how adolescent girls perceive and enact relationships. Through her content analysis of meeting transcripts and

observational logs of the student book clubs, she found that the most frequently occurring discussion revolved around the theme of peer relationships, for which she identified four sub-themes: 1) understanding the behavior of boys; 2) perspectives on romance and dating; 3) changing relationships with same-sex peers; and 4) back stabbing and bullying. For each of these themes, inspired by the book club literature, Polleck explains, “the text itself was pivotal, in that it mirrored the girls’ own experiences, allowing them to participate in the connective dimension of reader response theory” (p. 88). The girls each had unique reader’s response experiences that were complemented and made more dynamic through group discussion. Polleck expounds that the conversations about the texts enhance the girls’ experience immeasurably, as they “allow the girls to share commonalities and struggles so that the fictional and lived experiences are not enacted alone” (p. 88).

The girls were often confronted with the same themes in their own lives that appear in the literature about understanding boys and romance (all participants self-identified as heterosexual)—including superficiality, infidelity, and lack of communication. Polleck denotes that “within the space of the book club, they can do two valuable things: express their frustrations and begin to negotiate what qualities they do value in boys, so as to make more informed decisions in their selection of intimate partners” (pp. 83-84). Regarding the themes of same-sex peers and bullying, Polleck explains that the girls first analyzed literary female characters’ motivations, and then unraveled their own stories: “This dialogue then inspired personal connections...the girls then offered advice to each other acting as agents of change so that in the future, they can construct and sustain healthy and successful female friendships” (p. 89). It seems that beyond establishing values and expectations for their own female friendships,

they, through exploration of text, came to embody their values and build new relationships according to those values.

Polleck's study demonstrates that dialogic exchange adds a new dimension to participants' understanding of themes contributed by their literature. Book club members individually dissected and then created meaning from the text, which was then renegotiated through conversation. This social dimension of reader response allowed participants to carve out their own value systems and create interpersonal connections. Polleck argues that because of their experience with multiple perspectives in group readers response, "the girls may be more likely to question hierarchical ideologies, speak up for themselves, and feel less traumatized by problematic relationships" (p. 93). Polleck's study, while building upon the foundations of others in this literature review, captures the actualization of the connective dimension of reader response in the social sphere. Beyond demonstrating that reading and discussing texts together enriches participants' understandings of the text and of one another, she moreover shows that participants can extrapolate what they learn in such discussions and apply it to their own lives.

In a study similar to Polleck's, Kooy conducted research on two book clubs as sites of teacher inquiry and teacher development (2006). Book Club 1 was comprised of five teachers with a range of seven to twenty-five years of teaching experience, while Book Club 2 was comprised of teachers in their first year of teaching (p. 22). Using a methodology of narrative inquiry, Kooy examined the reciprocal effects of teaching activities and book club participation. She found that through the dialogic communities of the book clubs, the teacher participants were able to "reframe their evolving conceptions of teaching in new and powerful ways" (p. 121). The book clubs provided settings in which "theory becomes a revisionary tool"—essentially a mechanism of praxis (p. 121). Kooy emphasizes the boundary-crossing nature of book club

discussion as participants found connections between literature and life, and their teaching practice. Throughout the book club meetings, participants wove meaning between the plot points and themes of their literature and between the experiences of one another. Ultimately, Kooy argues, each book club constructed a network of support between participants, who consequently felt less isolated in the challenges they face in their profession. Kooy asserts that “teacher knowledge was actively provoked,” as “teachers became mutually responsible for the knowledge they created and carried” (p. 211). Kooy’s study provides convincing evidence of the benefits of book club practice for professionals of a common occupation across levels of experience.

Lyons and Ray (2014) are of a similar mind; though their focus is on doctoral students, they argue that the “purely theoretical” preparation of students in many academic programs is problematic when a decreasing number of graduates enter research-focus positions and instead become involved in applied fields. They propose a model for developing book clubs as a means of promoting praxis among student and faculty groups to supplement their theoretical backgrounds with knowledge that contributes to professional development in applied fields.

### **Book Club Studies in LIS**

Much of the LIS literature that relates the practice of reading to the LIS profession focuses on book club facilitation for patron benefit, or on genre studies for librarian professional development. The term “genre study” describes an experience in which participants immerse themselves in a genre by reading many books in the genre sequentially. For example, Wyatt (2008) encourages librarians involved in readers advisory to participate in such studies; her focus is on developing the knowledge needed to make savvy reading recommendations to patrons. Wyatt affirms that genre studies improve librarians’ ability to book talk, identify read-alikes, and

pinpoint appeal factors. In this way, genre studies do present an opportunity for career development for librarians. However, with a focus as narrow as readers' advisory, the article does not address benefits of reading practice for librarians in a holistic sense.

Many more studies related to book clubs as a component of library programming focus primarily on the benefits patrons reap from engagement with texts and with one another in such groups (Fajardo, 2010; Scharber, Melrose & Wurl, 2009). In the realm of school librarianship, for example, LaGarde and Winner (2012), creatively aimed to modernize the book club model to appeal to school-age learners by applying the concept of gamification to educational reading. Together, the two school librarians founded the Level Up Book Club, an online book club modeled on game-based learning. The Level Up Book Club employs key motivating elements of gamification, including immediate and continuous feedback—which is made public to encourage “competition and camaraderie” among participants (p. 47)—creation of challenging yet meaningful quests and opportunities for participants to achieve “epic wins” (p. 48). Reflective of the spirit of modern gaming, the Level Up Book Club has evolved continually since its inception. The foremost goal of the project, however, remains unchanged: “to challenge the way we deliver instruction and...set our students up for epic wins through rigorous instruction and meaningful tasks” (p. 48). LaGarde and Winner embrace the book club forum as enriching and motivating to students and apply the successes of game-based learning to innovatively tailor the learning model to young learners within the school library context.

Morris, Hughes-Hassell, Agosto, and Cottman's (2006) study adopts a uniquely dynamic perspective on book club participation. Their work examines urban teen participation in a street lit genre book club and draws connections between the experiences of patron-participants and librarian-facilitators. The book club study, which ran for a total of sixteen weeks, aimed to

achieve a deeper understanding of the genre's intense popularity among teen readers. The book club organizers additionally aimed "to address the need for teens to gain the skill of critical analysis so they could self-navigate through this genre with more wisdom and understanding" (p. 20). On average, fifteen females and twelve males between the ages of twelve to seventeen voluntarily participated in the weekly book club meetings.

The Morris et al. study affirms manifold benefits of involvement in the book club for both the patron-participants and the librarian-facilitators. Morris et al. found that the teen participants largely appreciate street lit because of the genre's success in representing street culture, and its "confirmation and validation of their lives, as well as legitimization of inner-city culture" (p. 22). Furthermore, the book club encouraged teen participants to question their previous acceptance of themes reflected in some of the selected texts, including negative representations of the African American community, and normalized depictions of unhealthy or abusive relationships. As the study period progressed, patron-participants began to express increasing interest in an expanded array of genres, reflecting a burgeoning interest in literature and discussion of text with others. While the book club at once motivated teens to engage with literature and empowered them to use their libraries, it simultaneously empowered the librarian-facilitators who serve them to gain insights into their patron communities, which translated into librarians' improved ability to make apt readers advisory and collection management decisions.

Irvin Morris (2012) studied the inquiry-based book club practice of urban and suburban-based public librarians who undertook intensive reading of street lit genre texts for professional development. The study contextualizes and explores questions about librarians' professional identity and practitioner inquiry within the readership interests of the librarians' service communities. To mirror the reading practice of their service communities, the book clubs

engaged with street lit genre materials, which were in high demand among especially the urban service community. Irvin Morris affirms:

Their reading responses revealed ways in which librarians unpacked, questioned, and transformed their perceptions towards their library patrons as well as how they began to modify their approaches to professional practice in the library such that they were more invested and involved in community life (p. v).

Irvin Morris found that book clubs, when used as an inquiry-based model of professional praxis, allow librarians to raise, engage with, and critically explore questions that contribute to the empowerment of librarians' professional identities.

It is clear from the literature that book clubs provide participants with a heuristic experience in which dialogic—collaborative interaction with texts and one another—enables new ways of seeing and interacting with one's world. Kooy (2006) advances this knowledge in relation to the teaching profession. She shows us that book club interactions constitute a kind of praxis in which participants are inspired by text to ruminate on lived experiences, and then enact new practices in their professional lives. In a similar vein, Morris et al. (2006) and Irvin Morris (2012) connect the benefits of book club participation to LIS professional praxis. They illuminate that librarian facilitation of book clubs as a component of library programming enables the formation of closer connections with and deeper understanding of librarians' patron communities. This, in turn, empowers librarians in their professional identities and in their role as community advocates.

Book club interactions are advantageous to participants ranging from casual readers to those invested in intensive professional praxis. What benefits can book clubs yield for LIS students? This population is especially interesting because, at the cusp of their careers, LIS

students are at once beginning to understand the established theory and practice of the LIS profession while also seeking to define their roles within it. With this thesis I hope to contribute to advancing the research on the librarian experience in book clubs. I aim to examine how the discoveries of the studies apply to LIS student book clubs at an especially pivotal time in their professional lives.



### **Chapter 3: Methodology and Design**

My study design involved two qualitative research methods, both ethnographic in nature: participant observation and interviews. According to Chu, (2015) interviews have historically been employed frequently in LIS research, while ethnographic approaches (such as participant observation) have recently gained traction in contemporary studies in the field. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) explain that in conducting ethnographic research, the researcher firstly participates in the routines of a setting, develops relationships with the people in it, and “observes all the while what is going on” (p. 1). Secondly, and equally importantly, the researcher “writes down in regular, systematic ways what she observes and learns while participating in the daily rounds of the lives of others” and in doing so “creates an accumulating written record of these observations and experiences” (p. 1).

Dewalt and Dewalt (2010) add that participant observation “includes a kind of self-observation, both of the way in which the investigator experiences the setting as participant, the particular values and biases s/he brings to the setting (reflexivity); and observation of the impact of the observer on the research setting” (p. 77). Regarding the inevitable subjectivity with which one engages in participant observation, conducting interviews enabled me to ground my understanding of the processes I observed within my participants’ direct testament. In this way, my experience as researcher ran parallel to the experience of my study participants: just as my participants read texts and then contextualized their readers response within that of their peers, I, in a sense, “read” my participants during our book club meetings, and then delved deeper into my reader response of these situations through my process of interviewing members. The views that they contributed during interviews gave context to and sometimes challenged my perceptions of book club processes, altogether altering and refining my understanding of my

observation in richly dynamic ways. Because my interviews were interspersed between book club meetings, this became an iterative process—observe, interview, repeat—that ultimately contributed to an understanding of my personal reflexivity in relation to my research interests.

Employing these two variant qualitative research methods—participant observation and interviews—contributed to successful triangulation of my findings. Indeed, V. Goodman (2011) urges LIS researchers to adopt a multi-pronged research methodology that includes combinations of methods such as observation, formal interviews, and casual discussion to yield rich data in exploration of specific aspects of LIS (p. 8). These divergent approaches to exploring common questions effectively provided insight into the meaning and significance of student participation in the BBW and LIS book clubs.

Beyond investigating book clubs as a research *concept*, other researchers have moreover used book clubs as research *tools* (Sumara, 1996; Kooy, 2006; Irvin Morris, 2012). These studies employ book club discussion groups as means by which to investigate how participants contribute and collaborate to create new knowledge, and the effects these processes have on participants and their learning. This study similarly positions book clubs as a research concept and a research tool, at once.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The ultimate purpose of my data collection and analysis was to discover themes—which Mellon defines as “topics or situations which occur and reoccur in the conversations or writings of respondents”—within my data (1986, p. 355). These themes revealed themselves steadily throughout the duration of the study. From its inception in January 2018 to its completion in September 2018, the work involved in this research took nine months. Data collection occurred,

## Enacting Feminist and Critical Librarianship

in total, across four months, as depicted in the following timeline, which also illustrates the texts that each group read:

### *Timeline of Data Collection and Analysis*

April 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● UHM LIS Book Club<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Text: <i>Blind Spot: The Hidden Biases of Good People</i> (2013) by Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald</li></ul></li></ul>
May 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Books By Women Book Club (BBW)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Text: <i>The Year of Magical Thinking</i> (2007) by Joan Didion</li></ul></li></ul>
June 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● UHM LIS Book Club<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Text: <i>Americanah</i> (2013) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie</li></ul></li><li>● Books By Women Book Club<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Text: <i>A Darker Shade of Magic</i> (2015) by V. E. Schwab</li></ul></li><li>● Interview: Penelope</li><li>● Interview: Romy</li><li>● Interview: Selma</li></ul>
July 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● UHM LIS Book Club &amp; Books By Women Book Club<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Text: <i>Feminist Pedagogy for Library Instruction</i> (2013) by Maria T. Accardi</li><li>○ Text: <i>Freshwater</i> (2018) by Akwaeke Emezi</li><li>○ Text: <i>Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love &amp; So Much More</i> (2014) by Janet Mock</li></ul></li><li>● Interview: Malia</li><li>● Interview: Akira</li></ul>
August 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Interview: Tess</li><li>● Data coding and analysis</li></ul>
Fall Semester 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Data coding and analysis, and writing thesis</li></ul>

I had been participating as a member in the BBW Book Club since its first meeting in the spring 2017 semester. As my data collection began, I continued my membership in the club, but assumed a less active role in book club discussions during the period of data collection, to refrain

from unduly influencing the course of dialogue. I was confident from the beginning that participant observation would be a successful method of research here, because I knew my presence would not disturb or drastically alter the book club environment as it might have if I had been a complete outsider to this community, suddenly on the scene with a notebook and recording device. My participants felt perhaps only minimally self-conscious due to the presence of the voice recorder at the first of each book club meetings, but quickly seemed to grow accustomed to (and even forget about) it.

I similarly conducted participant observation in the LIS Book Club. This book club hosted its first meeting in the spring 2018 semester. I was, like all other members, a newcomer to this reader community, but as within BBW, shared status with participants as a member of the UHM LIS Program. Participant observation in this book club provided interesting contrast to the less formal but more established BBW group.

As the timeline above indicates, I conducted participant observation in a total of five book club meetings: two in the BBW group, two in the LIS group, and one final session which combined the BBW and the LIS groups (this was due to the pattern on convergence between the two books clubs as time went on). The BBW Book Club typically met in the Japanese Garden at UH Mānoa and consisted of about five core members (including myself) who consistently read the books and attended the meetings, though meetings sometimes included an additional one or two members who attended less consistently. The LIS Book Club typically met in a building on the Mānoa campus, such as the LIS Commons in UHM's Hamilton Library. Before my data collection began, I estimated that roughly the same number of people in BBW would maintain consistent membership in the LIS Book Club. The summer semester, however, proved to be a busy time for travel, and on average, only about three or four people (including myself) attended

the meetings. While I was initially disappointed at the low turnout, I quickly came to realize that this intimate group size was a boon to my research. With fewer participants, the ones who were present were able to concentrate and delve much deeper into issues and opinions than they may have been able to had a greater number of participants been present to pull the conversation in variant directions.

At the first participant observation session of each, I held a short briefing session in which I established my role as a researcher and participant observer. I clarified any questions that participants had about my research and their role within it. In addition to participant observation, I also conducted individual interviews with core book club members—those who most consistently read the books and attended the meetings. My interviews with members of each community occurred during the summer 2018 semester, beginning after I had observed one book club meeting of each group. I expected to individually interview three to four people from each of the book clubs, and ultimately interviewed a total of six participants. As I mentioned in my introduction, cross-membership in the two book clubs increased over time. This factor, coupled with lower meeting turnout during the summer semester, resulted in a bit of difficulty interviewing three to four participants who were exclusively members in one group or another, which had been my initial goal. Instead, I interviewed a total of six people, three of whom were members of only BBW, one who was a member of only the LIS Book Club, and two who maintained members in both groups. Though there were one or two book club members in each group who participated on an irregular basis, I aimed to select regular participants—those, again, who consistently read the book club texts and attended the meetings—as my interviewees, because I believed that they would provide the most accurately representative sample of

members, and would be able to more fluently provide information on the book clubs' importance to and influence upon them.

*Study Participants*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Self-Identified Gender</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Length of Time in the LIS Program (at Start of Data Collection)</b>	<b>Educational Background</b>	<b>Regionality</b>
Penelope	Woman	25-34	3 semesters	Working towards 2nd master's degree	Hawai'i-based
Romy	Woman	25-34	2 semesters	Working towards 2nd master's degree	Hawai'i-based; has lived in various places in the U.S. and abroad
Selma	Woman	25-34	3 semesters	Working towards 1st master's degree	Hawai'i-based; has lived in various places in the U.S. and abroad
Malia	Woman	35-44	3 semesters	Working towards 1st master's degree	Hawai'i-based; has lived in various places in the U.S. and abroad
Akira	Woman	35-44	3 semesters	Working towards 2nd master's degree	Hawai'i-based; has lived in various places in the U.S.
Tess	Woman	25-34	4 semesters	Working towards 1st master's degree	Hawai'i-based

For those members of exclusively one group were or the other, I asked questions in my interview protocol designated for that respective group. For interviewees who maintained membership in both groups, I asked all the questions in my protocol. The interview protocol was designed to directly address my research questions regarding whether and how book club participation situated participants within a supportive network of LIS peers, complemented and supplemented LIS classroom pedagogy, and contributed to formation of participants' values and professional identity. The protocol began with general questions about why members participated in the BBW and/or the UHM LIS book clubs. These introductory questions were designed to allow participants to supply their own, uninfluenced answers about the meaning and significance of their membership and participation.

The questions then progressed to specifically address community formation in the book clubs, and then, the values with which each book club identified. They aim to garner a sense of the importance of these values to participants. Next, the questions prompted interviewees to consider the experience of learning within the book clubs and relate this learning to that which takes place in UHM LIS classroom discourse. Finally, the questions asked interviewees to consider how participation in one or both book clubs has influenced their values and their professional identity formation.

The protocol, included in Appendix II, consisted of nine questions, some multipart and some singular. I generally moved methodically through the interview protocol with each interviewee, though, as Leedy and Ormrod (2010), in discussion of interviews as a research method suggest, would encourage participants to discuss relevant topics that I did not explicitly solicit. This approach, they argue, often increases the probability that the researcher will become privy to serendipitous and “unforeseen data” (p. 147). Interviews allowed me to clarify questions

about members' perceptions of the intellectual processes of the book clubs and further allowed participants to express their feelings and insights directly. My interviews, which typically took thirty to forty-five minutes to complete, were audio-recorded. Shortly after each interview, I listened to the recording, transcribed it, and analyzed participants' responses in the context of my observations. Sample interview questions include:

- Do you feel that participation in the book club has brought you closer to your LIS peers who are also book club members?
- Do you draw connections between what you learn in this book club (if anything) and what you learn in the LIS program?
- What attitudes or values do you think will be most essential for your career as an LIS professional?

These questions helped to illuminate the honest perceptions of the participants on their book club membership and the role it plays in their educational, personal, and professional development. This process of transcribing and analyzing audio recordings of book club meetings and individual interviews was essential to illuminate major recurring themes and subthemes in the meeting dialogue and interview responses. After each book club meeting, I analyzed the audio transcripts and field notes from that particular session, in addition to the ones preceding it, so that I could gain a clearer understanding of recurring themes and modes of discussion. This reading and re-reading also aided in data triangulation, helping me to ensure that I maintained a level of consistency in interpreting my data. While my participant observation and field note taking allowed me to address my research questions contextually as I became first-hand witness to the processes, dynamics, and conversations of book club, my interviews, in complementary fashion, allowed my participants to address my questions directly and openly, in their own



words. I was, at once, able to observe whether and how book club participation situated participants within a supportive network of LIS peers, complemented LIS classroom pedagogy, and contributed to formation of participants' professional philosophy, and at the same time, I garnered participants' own opinions as they communicated them to me in their own words.

To protect participant confidentiality, I have assigned pseudonyms to each of my participants, and I omit any personally distinguishing information from my writing. To safeguard against compromises to participant anonymity, I kept my collected data and analysis on a password protected computer.

As a current UHM LIS student myself, as well as a member of both book clubs, I was personally involved in the communities I conducted my research among. On the one hand, this presented an advantage, as I already had access to these communities at the start of my research. Furthermore, as one who shares status with participants as both a UHM LIS Program student and a book club member, I was uniquely positioned to understand the context from which participants draw and relate their pedagogical and paraprofessional learning to their book club experience and vice versa. Indeed, Connaway and Powell affirm that a constructivist approach “asserts that individuals and groups actually construct reality which can, therefore, be properly understood only from the perspective of the context in which they function” (2010, p. 208). My privileged understanding of my participants’ experience as LIS students and LIS pre-professionals uniquely enabled me as researcher to situate observed book club processes and views expressed in interviews within the greater context of the experience and status I shared with participants.

On the other hand, however, this close involvement had the potential to become a barrier to fair and measured data interpretation. I was personally invested in these communities, and thus

I, too, espouse the values upon which BBW and the LIS Book Club were predicated. As such, I had to consider the degree to which this would influence my perspective. I took special care to triangulate my findings to obfuscate a biased slant in my data interpretation by engaging in a reflective journal practice, and by reading and re-reading my collected data. While acknowledging that I am a subjective being and that total objectivity is impossible, I resolved to engage in a praxis in which I continually examined my own convictions to firstly make myself consciously aware of them, and secondly ensure that would not unfairly influence my research practices.

### **Challenges in Study Design**

The greatest obstacle that I foresaw in my research was book club meeting attendance. Most of my data collection was to occur over the summer 2018 session—a time known to be busy for travel and for hosting visitors from off-island. I worried about absenteeism in the book club meetings I planned to observe. If one or more of my core participants was to be absent for any of the four book club meetings, I supported that those who were able to attend meet regardless. Even in instances where there were fewer participants at meetings than normal (which was often the case for the LIS Book Club especially), I maintain that the same essential processes important for my participant observation still occurred. In fact, a different member dynamic, I argue, revealed insights that would have otherwise remained unrecognized: fewer individuals at select meetings enabled those who were present to engage in more focused conversation on certain topics, without a greater number of participants pulling the discussion more rapidly in different, possibly tangential directions.

A second challenge I faced had its foundation in my curiosity and my interest in uncovering more. The conversations I had with my interviewees proved to be richly informative; perhaps even more so than I originally imagined they would be. In transcribing the audio recordings of these interviews and subsequently analyzing them, I would often think of questions based on interviewee-supplied information that had not come to me during the interview. I found myself wishing that in designing my study, I had structured individual interviews as two-part series: the first in which I would move through the bulk of my protocol, and the second in which we continued the conversation and explore more deeply the themes and perspectives the interviewee had provided in the first. Follow-up interviews, I think, would have provided more enriching data for my research and a more satisfying experience for me as researcher. The silver lining of this situation is that perhaps the absence of a follow-up to every interview imposed some constraints on my data interpretation and enabled a slightly more focused project.

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of my study design was the high potential for the “echo chamber effect,” in which individuals with common values simply reinforce those values among one another without presenting challenges to a shared perspective (Field Notes from LIS Book Club Meeting #2, June 2018). Indeed, the danger of the echo chamber came up in several book club meeting conversations, and the participants seemed to consider it both within the book club settings and beyond. Because my participants did share many common values, I believe this contributed to a reinforcement of those values among the groups, rather than radical shifts among individual participants’ values. However the results of this study remain valuable because they demonstrate that while participants often maintained the same values, that book club participation made their values and ethical stances more nuanced. I argue that these like-minded groups challenged members to further and refine shared values. While there was not change of

values, there was change *within* values, which lends credibility to the constructive power of intentioned book clubs.

### **A Note on Writing Style**

Throughout this thesis I strive for ethnographic authenticity by situating myself as researcher within the study. My writing practice aligns with my principal belief that a reflexive stance is essential for critical inquiry-based research.

In direct quotations from participants, I omit discourse markers, such as “um” and “uh,” along with disfluencies that are not needed to preserve a speaker’s meaning. I found, in initially scrupulously including these speech characteristics, that they often obfuscated the meaning of my participant’s words. While easy to understand during participant-observation and audio transcription processes, they cluttered and detracted from written representation of direct quotes. Also, when generalizing or making use of the term “one” to convey a point, rather than make use of the clunky and gender binary “he or she” or “his or her/s,” I sometimes use the gender neutral pronouns they/them/theirs.

### **Aim of Research**

The aim of my research was, in summary, to determine how LIS students benefit from participation in book clubs during their time in their LIS master’s program. I examined whether participants felt that participation in an LIS-focused peer book club:

1. Established and enabled membership in a supportive community of peers;
2. Contributed to personal and professional learning in conjunction with coursework
3. Contributed to participants' formation of professional identities.

With this study design, I hoped to better understand the meaning and significance of participation in book clubs as a tool of educational, personal, and professional development. As I established in my literature review, the world of scholarly research is saturated with studies demonstrating the transformative nature of book clubs, but markedly lacking in studies exploring the experience of librarians in book clubs; which is surprising because of how intimately many librarians work with books and other forms of media, and because librarians are often presumed to be book club members because of their frequent facilitation of book clubs among patron populations as a component of library programming (Irvin Morris, 2012).

With my research, I hoped to arrive at a better understanding of whether and how the dialogic processes of books clubs, in which LIS students relate texts to themselves and to one another, transform their understandings of their roles and identities as LIS professionals. It was my intention to contribute to the field of LIS by illuminating participation in book clubs as an avenue by which pre-service LIS professionals can build community, philosophy, and identity, and moreover, enact the values of feminism, progressivism, and a diversity ethic.

## Chapter 4: Data and Analysis

Through this research, I sought to achieve an understanding of the creative, constitutive, and generative processes of the BBW and the LIS book clubs. The results of this study illuminate three broad essential elements of student participation in these value-driven and LIS-intentioned book clubs, which relate to my research questions focused on community building, professional knowledge, and value formation. In this section, I will show how these book clubs functioned as communities of practice that offered emerging LIS professionals networks of interpersonal and professional support; how they complemented and supplemented LIS classroom pedagogy; and how they empowered members through encouragement of professional value and philosophy formation. In the following sections, data—in the form of participant quotes from field notes and interviews—help to illustrate the creative processes of book club participation in members' own words.

### **Research Question 1: Community Formation | *In participating in the BBW Book Club and/or the LIS Book Club, in what ways do members feel that they gain a supportive network of LIS peers?***

At the advent of my research, the LIS Book Club had just formed, but the BBW book club had already been meeting for one year. It was my strong inclination to believe, after having participated as a BBW member since its inception, that while designed as an extracurricular leisure activity, BBW was more complex and impactful for participants (just as I was inclined to believe that the LIS Book Club would be). When initially establishing my research topic and parameters, I reflected on my own journaling practice, which conveyed authentic enthusiasm for the connections I felt I was forming with my peers through the exchange of ideas centered on and inspired by collectively reading books. In informal discussion with BBW members, I learned that they shared similar impressions of the book club as an opportunity for bonding. It was my

hope, in conducting this research, to explore and develop this notion. In my later, formalized reflective writing practice, this theme would prove to be a mainstay; and one which my data collection and analysis would support. Ultimately, the BBW and the LIS Book Clubs engendered supportive networks of LIS peers by successfully facilitating friendship formation; by establishing a practice of caring and narrative sharing that reinforced these friendships; and by fostering collaborative praxis.

### *Adaptation of an Alternative LIS Social Structure*

The UHM LIS Master's Program allows its students a great deal of freedom in selecting the order in which to take classes and in timeline for completion of the degree. While this flexibility represents a democratization of education that makes the graduate experience more accessible for those balancing commitments outside of academia, it also means that LIS students are not organized into official cohorts—an arrangement that many of my participants, while valuing equity in education, seemed to crave in their own graduate experience. Thus, study participants used the book clubs to construct an alternative or complement to the social culture facilitated by the LIS Program, adapting their book clubs into de facto cohorts. Simultaneously, many of the participants conceived of the book clubs as effective entry points into both friendships with LIS peers and into professional communities of like-minded individuals. Participants found this networking to be an especially appealing aspect of book club participation, due to their unanimous desire to form connections with peers.

In her study of book clubs comprised of women teachers, Kooy (2006) ascribes a sense of “interdependency” to the relationships that developed between members. Interdependency was likewise present between members of the BBW and the LIS Book Clubs. Members helped one

another by providing interpersonal support that aided their navigation through the LIS Program, individual classes, and paraprofessional or professional opportunities. Penelope explained that she initially joined BBW “because we were new to the program and I wanted to bond and make friends...I wanted to be closer to everybody in the program” (Participant Interview, June 2018). Indeed, members did become friends, providing both the emotional support and comic relief so helpful in countering the stresses of graduate school. Essentially, the BBW and the LIS Book Clubs actualized close-knit communities, which contributed to members’ satisfaction with their graduate experience.

The book clubs furthermore provided an excellent “excuse” for those who might have been shy to initiate friendships to do so. Selma told me that she believed her graduate school experience was immensely enriched through book club participation, because she was able to experience a collaborative reading and meaning-making experience with peers, as part of a group, rather than alone, on her own. In our interview, she jokingly explained, “we’re not going to be like, ‘hey do you want to get together and then just talk about our shared experience?’” (Participant Interview, June 2018). The book clubs, Selma intoned, enabled LIS students to convene to discuss and arrive at new understandings of shared experience under pretense (at least at first) of discussion of books. While the book clubs created a “need” or reason for participants to come together initially, the sense of community that developed within each book club quickly became justification enough to meet.

Besides serving as a surrogate for an official cohort model, the book clubs moreover provided a foil to the more formal, structured design of the classroom. In contrast to the classroom, the book clubs were free from the power dynamics, formality, and time constraints inherent in typical pedagogical settings. Akira described the social atmosphere of BBW as “a



very calm and relaxed atmosphere where I can interact with my peers in a more informal setting than a classroom” (Participant Interview, July 2018). The unique attributes of the book clubs facilitated friendships in ways that the traditional classroom does not.

In the classroom, teachers—even those who intentionally seek to actualize an equity-based pedagogical approach (Accardi, 2013)—have intellectual and institutional authority over their students. The hierarchical structure of the traditional, patriarchal classroom positions teachers as “the ultimate authority on all knowledge and information,” and students as passive receptacles of that knowledge and information (Accardi, p. 25). In contrast to this traditional model, the book club paradigm actualized a form of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) in which all participants contributed to knowledge production. The social structure of the book clubs was lateral, with some members taking a more active role in logistical organization than others; but all enjoying the agency to contribute equitably, and all occupying both the teacher and the learner position simultaneously. This egalitarian architecture facilitated friendships among members.

Notwithstanding power disparities, the book clubs also negated other factors common to the traditional classroom that can inhibit the formation of meaningful relationships among peers, including the performative necessity of classroom participation. In nearly all my individual interviews, participants referenced a perceived need to conduct themselves with propriety and comport in the classroom setting, and to present themselves, in class, as academically inclined. A focus on controlling how one presents oneself to their academic community can translate into a censoring of the self, which can in turn, make it more difficult for an individual to connect interpersonally with their peers. Because participants felt it was less of an imperative to perform

in the casual book club settings than in the classroom, the book clubs were instrumental in supporting the development of friendships.

The book clubs' relationship with time additionally contrasted with the treatment of time in the classroom. The book clubs were settings in which participants were free to, and in fact, expected to, take time to ruminate on texts (Sumara, 1994) and work through them collaboratively; whereas in the classroom, time is often constrained by pre-established agendas and limited by scheduling. Without these time limiters, book club discussion, while tethered loosely to a text, was essentially uncontrolled. Stories of lived experience, with varying degrees of relatability to LIS, were welcomed into discussion of text—and participants felt sanguine in sharing them—especially as the culture of the book clubs encouraged rumination on, rather than rushing through, personal stories. At the root of the book clubs in fact, was the intention of spending time. Members carved out time from their often chaotic schedules to spend time with one another, to become familiar with one another. This dedication of time to other individuals was an act of goodwill that each member presented to the others; a signal of the intention to foster friendship.

### *Personal Narratives and the Perpetuation of an Ethic of Care*

Noddings (1984) proposed that the basis of moral action is founded upon caring for others and being cared for—the memory of the latter reinforces the practice of the former. According to Noddings, an ethic of care emphasizes interpersonal relationships rooted in receptivity and responsiveness. In the book club context, an ethic of care and the sharing of personal narratives had a reciprocal effect whereby one encouraged and perpetuated the other. The care and compassion with which participants initially approached one another established an

environment that enabled all participants to feel comfortable enough to share of themselves in dialogue with one another. Participants unfailingly exhibited an honoring and encouraging of one another's voices. This sharing created personal connections between participants which, in turn, further motivated them to care for each other, thus reinforcing their friendships.

In her seminal work on feminist pedagogy in the realm of library instruction, Accardi recounts her observations on the effect of an ethic of care on the classroom:

In my own classroom experience, it is evident to me that students respond well to caring. Just like any other vulnerable human being, they want to be the subject of care. They want to be cared about and cared for. And what makes care feminist is that it sees students as whole human beings, not vessels to be filled with information and knowledge. It sees learners as people with thoughts and feelings that they bring into the classroom, and which, in turn, affect how they learn...Taking the time to listen to students, to honor their voices, to rely on them for examples, and to encourage them to listen to each other all exemplify the ethic of care (2013, p. 44).

In the same way that Accardi describes, the book clubs' ethic of caring dictated that participants saw one another as holistic, multidimensional beings, and valued one another's lived experiences. Though members did not always agree regarding book club texts and their interpretations of them, members did feel that they could trust one another to engage in respectful and constructive conversation. In our interview, when I asked Selma to describe the social atmosphere of the book clubs, she shared, "I'm anxious so I always need to know what I'm going into." The positive intent that she intimated from her book club peers, though, quelled her anxiety and enabled her participation in these circles. Her trust in other book club members was

rewarded, and she affirmed that the social atmosphere of each club “really feels comfortable” (Participant Interview, June 2018).

Indeed, the vulnerability inherent in the sharing of personal narratives and reactions—in letting oneself be “read,” in a sense—was made possible by the respect book club members demonstrated to one another. And sharing *is* vulnerable because one’s comments on a book can reveal much more about the speaker than about the text. Romy supported the reader response of varying interpretations of text from collaborative discourse:

One of my favorite things about books is sometimes it feels like I read a completely different book than someone else, just because our perspectives on it are so different—it’s almost a completely different story. And I know everyone brings in their own life experience and their own professional experience so everyone is going to have something different—a different interpretation, or take, on it (Participant Interview, June 2018).

These different interpretations, as Romy explained, derive from life experience. The sharing of personal anecdotes and the verbalizing of the connections one made between textual interpretation and lived experience was indicative of trust among the group. Members had to be able to trust one another to feel comfortable enough to share the stories and opinions that they might ordinarily have kept private. This sharing, in turn, reinforced a sense of intimacy among the group, which encouraged the further contributions of personal stories and perspectives. The system was self-perpetuating.

This process could also retroactively affect individuals’ reader response. When one person shared a personal connection to a character or situation in a book, other members were invited to incorporate that individual’s thinking into their own response to the text. Of the reading process, Iser (1980) says:

In literature, where the reader is constantly feeding back reactions as he obtains new information, there is just such a continual process of realization, and so reading itself ‘happens’ like an event, in the sense that what we read takes on the character of an open-ended situation, at one and the same time concrete and yet fluid (p. 68).

As one progresses through a text, one is receiving and incorporating new information in such a way that one’s perspective is constantly shifting. Book club conversations extend this process of perpetual re-cognizing by presenting participants with additional new information to osmose. Members could assimilate ideas that had not previously occurred to them into their new understanding of a book club text. Through practice, this assimilation or incorporation altered the architecture through which they perceived other books, just as it can with subsequent lived experiences. Indeed, bell hooks relays that “personal testimony, personal experience, is such fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory because it usually forms the base of our theory” (1994, p. 70). Selma, referencing both book clubs, spoke poignantly on this topic. In our interview, she confided with Socratic eloquence that the more she learned, the less she felt she knew. She imparted that the diversity of experience and knowledge that her peer participants were able to contribute to book club dialogue helped her to understand the multifaceted nature of lived experience and its interpretation.

Selma’s experience echoes Kooy’s assertion that her book club participants “became increasingly aware of individual personalities, differences, and a range of knowledge and perspectives and the benefits of the interchanges and exchanges” (p. 211). In the way Selma described, the book club itself became lived experience that influenced subsequent experience, both textual and situational. Book club members gained a lucid understanding of their fellow participants’ conceptual paradigms as they “tried on” the perspectives of their fellow members in

their subsequent individual reading practice, and began to anticipate the reactions their fellow readers would have to facets of a text. In these ways, book club members found themselves assuming more empathic, imaginative reading practices. This alteration of schema can be an intense experience, and as a result it can forge bonds between participants.

### *Communities of Practice, Communities of Praxis*

The egalitarian tight-knit communities of practice that developed within the book clubs and the ethic of caring that reinforced book club friendships also served the practical purpose of enabling participants to discuss and manage challenges to their values that they faced in LIS-related arenas. The solution-oriented discourse so characteristic of book club meetings enabled those experiencing challenges to both gain perspective on and to devise solutions to such issues. Discussions often prompted members to critically examine their approaches to challenges, and then refine their theory based on book club peer feedback.

In this vein, Kooy, who studied book club participants already immersed in their teaching careers, found that “the book club construct offers a stay against the debilitating attrition that affects the profession and offers constructive possibilities for more teachers to engage in dialogue around the challenges and issues they face...with other like-minded individuals” (2003, p. 119). She writes that the newer teachers in particular “develop[ed] their book club into a viable community and culture for professional learning. It has become a safe place to tell and hear their personal stories of teaching” (p. 148). The BBW and the LIS Book Clubs, like those that Kooy studied, guaranteed a safe space for LIS students to help one another find ways to address challenges. These challenges most often involved perceived threats to members’ social justice-oriented values.

One participant, for example, experienced a situation that challenged her to choose between her standing up for her values and avoiding interpersonal conflict. Her story contributes valuable data on how learning was accomplished via book club community support. A library colleague of hers had been making an argument for addressing a dwindling library budget by taking one particular course of action, while she believed that the budget issue could be abated by more aggressively supporting open access and moving to divest from expensive electronic journal and database subscriptions. About her conversation with her colleague, she said, “normally I would be like, ‘actually if we had open access this wouldn’t be an issue.’ And instead I didn’t say shit. And I still think about that because I am *not* that person” (Field Notes from LIS Book Club Meeting #2, June 2018). In this case, this participant was bothered that she had not shared her value-based opinion with her colleague. As her anecdote illustrates, these book clubs provided a space for participants to share how it is often more difficult to stand up for one’s values in the workplace than it may seem. In sharing their challenges, however, the book club members became better prepared to deal with similar challenges, because they had the opportunity to envisage the ways in which theory and conviction may be challenged or actualized in real, practical situations.

Situations that have played out in unsatisfactory ways in participants’ para/professional experience became, in the book club setting, theoretical practice for future dilemmas. Discussion enabled participants to reflect on why they did not speak or act in line with their values and articulate how they would have—or will—address such issues in the future. Indeed, the same book club member attributed her reluctance to voice her opinion in her workplace to honoring the power differential that existed between her and her more established colleague. Once she understood why the situation presented a challenge for her, her resolve was set. She expressed

her desire to return to her colleague and continue the conversation in a constructive, yet forthcoming way.

Sharing personal responses and stances allowed participants to gain perspective on the challenges they were facing in their professional lives; especially when other book club members shared their insight on a situation that they were somewhat removed from, and could thus lend a degree of objectivity to. When participants face similar challenges to their values and opinions in the future, they will have these shared narratives to recall, and to draw strength and inspiration from. The situations that have fallen flat in the past will likely become ammunition for future success. As Romy stated, book club participation “enhances being able to communicate about these things. I think it enhances our practice because we can build ideas off each other” (Participant Interview, June 2018).

Kooy argues of her study participants, “telling stories that counteract the isolation and loneliness they feel in their new profession lessens the second-guessing and self-doubt so common to new teachers” (p. 124). The BBW and the LIS Book Clubs have similar potential, as they both created supportive social and professional networks for participants, and further generated and strengthened values that participants will carry forth into their careers.

**Research Question 2: Complementing Classroom Pedagogy | *How does book club discussion complement and/or supplement LIS classroom pedagogy? Does book club participation contribute to member professional learning and knowledge?***

My research supported the notion that book club discussion complements and supplements LIS classroom pedagogy, thereby contributing to member professional learning and knowledge. LIS-intentioned book clubs are one channel by which LIS students can more deeply immerse themselves in this field of study. BBW and the LIS Book Club contributed to LIS



learning through textual content; through a challenge to participants to define their ethical positions; and through book club design.

*Learning Through Textual Content and Discussion*

Learning accomplished in the book clubs was layered: it came from textual content, from individual reader response, and from dialogic collaboration. Textual content provided the foundation upon which discussion was built, and discussion reinforced and expanded upon ideas presented in the texts. In a statement largely reflective of many participants' thoughts, Selma shared that she "learn[ed] a lot when we read the nonfiction titles—as in, the actual content of the books we read" (Participant Interview, June 2018). She went on to highlight a favorite aspect of the book clubs: "we get to all read one thing and then discuss it as a group, which sometimes we do with articles for class. That's probably my favorite way to learn" (Participant Interview, June 2018). Penelope shared:

I don't know about you but sometimes when you're just reading for class, sometimes as soon as the class is over, it's like you just dump it all out of your head. But you seem to hold onto fiction and nonfiction that you read outside of class in a different way.

(Participant Interview, June 2018).

Perhaps it was the group discussion that Selma referenced that was responsible for participants' ability to successfully "hold onto" learning accomplished within the book clubs.

Because the LIS Book Club situated its reading practice within the LIS discipline explicitly, this club supplemented LIS classroom learning to a greater degree than BBW. BBW, though, certainly complemented LIS learning through its fostering of LIS service-oriented ideals of empathy and curiosity. BBW member, Akira, affirmed:

My experiences in the [BBW] book club have strengthened the belief generally championed within LIS curriculum—particularly regarding information literacy—of exposure to multiple points of view on a topic—in the case of [the] book club, feminism and/or women’s issues (Participant Interview, July 2018).

Besides substantiating members’ understandings of LIS theory, participants illustrated ways in which they believed their book club membership would enhance their LIS professional practice in strikingly practical ways. Several of the participants remarked on a sense of improved ability to conduct readers advisory—a fundamental library service—because of their book club membership. Participating in a book club often requires one to read outside of one’s comfort zone: to engage with texts that one might otherwise remain unaware of, or even avoid. Rather than feeling inconvenienced or burdened by this, the book club members treasured this aspect of their participation. They gladly let their peers push them beyond the bounds of their literary comfort zones. About this impetus to read more widely, Selma commented, “that’s actually been one of the best parts of these book clubs” (Participant Interview, June 2018). This process of engagement with the unfamiliar encouraged book club members to develop a more nuanced understanding of genres and subgenres.

Beyond readers advisory, participants also attested to having been able to hone practical skills that many had practiced in classroom settings, but found they were able to further refine and adapt in the real-life scenario of the book club. Such skills included participating in and leading active group discussions, reading and discussing critically, and reflecting on professional practice and identity within a community of practice. One of the members who took a great deal of initiative to organize meetings also shared that her book club involvement made her more comfortable with organizing groups, advertising book club initiatives through email newsletters

and webpages, and utilizing outside sources, such as readers' guides, to facilitate group learning and discussion.

I gleaned a pervasive sense of urgency to learn among my participants. For instance, participants found it valuable to spend time discussing literature with LIS peers who had taken different classes from them because it allowed them to capture knowledge and ideas that they may not have encountered in their own classes. Selma shared:

This is a good way for me to hear from people who are in or have taken different courses than I have, especially since there are so many electives in our program. They can relate the books we read to what they are learning or to the work, volunteer, [or] internship experiences they are in or have had, which is useful to hear about (Participant Interview, June 2018).

Participants also felt strongly that their book club membership would enhance their ability to deliver diverse content to patron communities in equitable ways. When participants became privy to the perspectives of their peers during book club meetings, they refined their own ability to understand a single scenario from multiple points of view. This process prompted participants, while reading book club texts, to anticipate and wonder about their peers' interpretations of the same text based on what they had come to know about one another from previous conversations. Penelope elucidated:

I learned from the other members because everyone comes in from a different perspective of the readings, like, I always come in with a queer theory perspective; [another participant] has a super feminist perspective (Participant Interview, June 2018).

Through juxtaposition of nuanced ideas, participants learned to become both more critical and more thoughtful readers—two characteristics that will undoubtedly improve their

librarianship practice in terms of reference services, readers advisory, collection management, and community advocacy. Romy praised the LIS Book Club for its capacity to teach a diversity ethic through members' contrasting experiences and perspectives. She observed:

I think that if this was an LIS class we would learn a lot about implementing diversity into our collection development policies and practices. And also with readers advisory, we'd learn more about how we can advocate for diversity and equality in our readers advisory work with patrons (Participant Interview, June 2018).

Exposure to others' reader response in the book club will help these future librarians understand what their one-day patrons might want or need from their reading experience.

Penelope spoke poignantly on a collection of thoughts when she reflected:

I think it'd be interesting if we had LIS class that focused on...social issues, but I think it's probably important and it would be an interesting class because when you are looking at fiction or nonfiction as we are, and are relating to individuals or a plot line—I think I read somewhere that it's easier to change views when you're looking at fiction because you empathize with the character so it's kind of like walking a mile in someone's shoes, kind of thing. And as opposed to looking at a textbook and looking outside-in, you'd be looking inside-out at an issue, which I feel like maybe we should do because that's why patrons go to the library, right? They're looking for an experience. Sometimes I think it's easy to forget that the books aren't just these physical objects; they're an experience for the users. So...how can we look at the issues from the user perspective? But also, how can we use these to change things for the community from this perspective where people can empathize? (Participant Interview, June 2018).

Beyond sharpening their critical assessments of textual information, these practiced abilities will likely extend further into participants' LIS practice, making these students better equipped to envision and enact equitable and inclusive library services.

### *Learning Through a Challenge to Define One's Ethical Positions*

Another key benefit that participants derived from their book club membership was an ability to more clearly define their positions on ethical issues related to LIS. Participants were able to relate ethical issues presented in book club texts to both their classroom learning and to their personal and paraprofessional experience; and then to test the various angles and perspectives presented by their peers. By sharing and debating elements of their value systems, participants engaged in a process of negotiation that ultimately delivered them to more profound understandings of their own positions.

The LIS Book Club's discussion on neutrality, inspired by the text *Blind Spot: The Hidden Biases of Good People*, provides a pointed example of how these ethical conversations played out. Much of the discussion of the *Blind Spot* meeting focused on the notion that, as librarians, we have a moral and ethical obligation to acknowledge and then wrestle with our own biases, so that we will be better able to effectively advocate for our patron communities and make decisions that are not influenced to such a degree by bias. As Selma said, in relation to librarianship, "every time you make a choice, that has a consequence" (Participant Interview, June 2018). Librarians' choices either uphold or disrupt a status quo, and the effects of those choices become evident when taken en masse—one individual's actions may seem insignificant in a grand scheme, but combined with many other individuals' actions, can have large scale effects. In reflection of the cumulative effect of seemingly infinitesimal choices, Romy asked, in

relation to her paraprofessional and future professional work, “how am I treating all the patrons? How am I doing collection development? Am I picking mainly white male authors or am I picking more diverse authors?” (Participant Interview, June 2018). To continue Romy’s line of questioning, do we assist patrons who look or seem like us with more patience or investment than others? Do we collect materials that are written by, about, and primarily for people of our own demographics? Are we advantaging some groups of people and disadvantaging others with our subscription and exposure to, promotion and embrace of, certain latent ideologies? The LIS Book Club considered all these questions.

Penelope reflected on the systematic nature of bias, insisting that even if one does not, on an intellectual level, accept a biased opinion of a group of people, that nevertheless, “usually your first thought is within the system of what we have learned about certain groups of people.” She added that “even if that’s not how you act, the first thought is still within the bias” (Field Notes from LIS Book Club Meeting #1, April 2018). Tess shared, “I remember from years of tumbling on Tumblr: I think there was a post where somebody was reacting to a person they saw on the street and they determined that—what I think in the first five seconds is determined by society and what I think after those first five seconds is what I think as a person. Like you might check yourself after the first five or ten seconds—why did I think that immediately when I saw that person?” (Field Notes from LIS Book Club Meeting #1, April 2018).

Often, a snap judgement is all one can manage in considering the myriad people one fleetingly encounters. We have neither the luxury of time nor the mental acumen to challenge every bias-infused thought our minds produce, let alone notice them. Surely we often experience prejudicial thoughts about individuals we see only briefly before our attention focuses rapidly again on something else—before the intellect and the conscience have the opportunity to correct

this. With its thorough assimilation into one's consciousness and its persistence in informing snap judgements, Tess argued, the bias is reinforced simply by the frequency with which we may encounter it in our own minds.

During book club discourse on *Blind Spot*, the participants also illuminated an interesting relationship between bias and neutrality. They suggested that bias is inherent to the human condition and neutrality is impossible. They equated the refusal to acknowledge bias with the embrace of neutrality: two mechanisms that uphold the dominant culture and status quo. Bias is one lens through which the impossibility of neutrality becomes glaring clear; we are subjective creatures who make decisions based on experience, snap judgement, emotions, comfort, worldview. Our biases often influence—if not outright determine—our thoughts and actions (Banaji and Greenwald, 2013). The word “judge” means both to have an opinion and to form one. The difference becomes difficult to extricate. The LIS Book Club grappled with the concept of neutrality, which they framed as a perhaps outdated heirloom of their profession. The participants reiterated the idea that to be “neutral” in librarianship is to take a political stance that is tacitly supportive of the dominant culture, and thus to be dismissive of everything outside of the mainstream.

The students retroactively applied the theories presented in *Blind Spot: The Hidden Biases of Good People* to questions presented to them in LIS classes, and then in turn, to their imagined future professional practice. In one exchange, the students tried to work through how, in their professional roles, they would manage when confronted with views that they are profoundly opposed to. Romy said:

This reminds me of a question we had in [LIS] 610...We had to answer this question about how would you respond to someone wanting to add Holocaust literature to your

library. And so that was a really tough question because I lived in a community... [that] was very racist, and if they were trying to add pro-racist books to the library, I'd be like, "no—they're already so many" (Field Notes from LIS Book Club Meeting #1, April 2018).

Of course, Romy personally took issue with the content of such books and was further disturbed by the presence and quantity that she encountered in the community in which she lived. Several in the group agreed that they would be strongly tempted not to engage with such materials and, despite the library profession's historical mandate of including all sides of an issue, would be resistant to accepting such materials into their library collections. The students related their lived experiences—which inform their current positions—to the ethical dilemmas that will potentially (or likely) arise in their work as LIS professionals. As the discussion on Holocaust denial literature continued, the students sought to carve out a mental space that might accommodate both their personal convictions and the doctrine of library neutrality. The following data, in the form of dialogic exchange, focused on anti-Semitic texts (from the LIS Book Club Meeting #1, April 2018), represents the students collaboratively working to define the parameters of their personal and professional ethical codes:

Selma: I don't want to expose myself to that kind of thinking. Because I think exposure is really important and I don't even want to at all spend time and brain power to [sic] honestly what I think is the wrong side. So I admit that that is, like, the opposite side of how they think. You know? It is, but I just still wouldn't.

...

Malia: But if you wanted to have a discussion with people who read that book you have to know...



...

Romy: Where they're coming from.

Malia: Where they're coming from. It does have the *energy* though; I think it's that you don't want to absorb the energy.

...

Penelope: I feel like it does more harm.

...

Selma: To expose—to spread the message?

...

Penelope: Because then you maybe have the people who had relatives who experienced the Holocaust and they're having to defend this horrible thing that *existed* and *happened*. And who are you harming? The Holocaust deniers won't be harmed by maybe believing that it happened, but the people who are saying that it happened *cause it did*—they're not gaining anything.

...

Romy: But what if you live in a community that...they really want to read these...Holocaust denial books and there isn't really a representation of Holocaust Survivors or even a Jewish population in the communities they serve? What would you do? Cause I don't think I could remain neutral in that situation.

While students may feel hesitant to share their qualms about neutrality in a classroom setting, this data demonstrates that book club settings allows for participants to more openly process their thoughts, and to further appeal for help from the group. Questions, such as the

“What would you do?” and clarifications, like Selma’s “To expose—to spread the message?” were common occurrences that enabled participants to investigate ethical conundrums in a constructive way that may help them feel better prepared to face ethical dilemmas as professionals. There exists a sociocultural nuance in librarian-patron interactions (Irvin Morris, 2014), and it is worthwhile to examine them case by case to build theory from the foundation up. In this instance, and many others, participants took the time to fully explore an LIS issue, relating it to their personal experiences and their reader response to book club texts. Book clubs are uniquely positioned to encourage collaborative exploration of ethical concepts that are introduced in the LIS Program, and then negotiated, adapted, and reified according to individual or group definitions as part of one’s professional identity formation.

### *Learning Through Book Club Design*

In addition to learning from the content of the books and from one another, participants also accomplished and enacted learning as a result of book club design. The nonhierarchical structure of the book clubs established an environment that enabled participants to actively “critique and challenge patriarchal power relations that traditionally govern the classroom” (Accardi, p. 43). Accardi writes that “the feminist classroom is designed to be inherently democratic and collaborative, is a place where all voices are valued, and is also a site where students and teachers partner to create a respectful learning community” (p. 41). Both BBW and the LIS Book Club essentially embodied the characteristics Accardi ascribes to feminist learning design.

In our individual interviews, each of the participants emphasized the value they placed on the lived experiences of their fellow book club members. By acknowledging their diverse

backgrounds (age, education, regionality, sexual orientation, ethnicities/cultures, religious identities, etc.), experiences, and knowledge, book club members established an inclusive environment that resisted and countered preferential treatment of those in the mainstream, dominant culture and instead enacted a learning environment that privileged diverse experiential knowledge. Accardi writes that “men traditionally have epistemological privilege,” and that an “androcentric worldview invalidates and erases the woman’s point of view” (p. 18). In contrast—by firstly embracing diverse and inclusive textual content and then raising women’s narrative interpretation informed by experiential knowledge to the forefront—both the BBW and the LIS Book Club actively privileged non-dominant, non-mainstream ways of knowing and methods of knowledge production (Accardi, 2013).

Relationships in the book clubs were symmetrical and non-hierarchical. Power would ebb and flow in the meetings, as members passed it laterally from one speaker, to the next, to the next. It was never monopolized or sequestered by some participants over others; rather, everyone displayed not only a willingness, but a keen and curious desire to listen to their fellow members’ thoughts. In meetings, participants always organized themselves in an inclusive circle so that everyone present could see, address, and listen to everyone else. Each participant contributed knowledge when inspired to do so, which then became a part of the greater group body of knowledge.

The book club as an egalitarian, inclusive pedagogical model enacted learning according to principles of critical librarianship, of which feminism, progressivism, and a diversity ethic are integral components. Beyond furthering members’ knowledge of these ideologies through book club content, the book club architecture embodied these values, and in participating, so too, did each of the members. In this way, participants were able to practice communication and learning

according to their espoused principles and will likewise be better prepared to enact these values in their future interpersonal relationships with colleagues, patrons, and communities, as well as in their information literacy instruction. BBW and the LIS Book Club both evolved into systems that supported student learning in conjunction with the LIS program. Once participants graduate from their LIS studies, the book club design they have collaboratively formed will likely sustain continued learning and safeguard the longevity of the wisdom amassed through the dialogic exploration they embarked upon together.

### **Research Question 3: LIS Identity Formation / *To what degree does LIS-focused/intentioned book club membership contribute to formation of participants' professional identity?***

When it came time to synthesize my research into a coherent written work, I was surprised, looking back at my collected data in its entirety, that most of my participants did not feel that their book club participation had radically changed their values. Instead, they attested to a sense that the book clubs had power to further the values that they *already* held. In fact, only one of my interviewees felt that her values had truly changed through book club participation, while three reported that they maintained the same values before and through book club participation. The remaining two interviewees felt that they could not definitively say whether the book clubs inspired development of new values, but emphasized that their book club participation had an enhancing effect on values they prized. When I asked Penelope—a member of this third category—whether she would have approached LIS with feminist, progressive, and diversity ideals without having participated in the book club, she reported:

Probably, but...it would be a more empty answer without the book clubs because we've had all these discussions. I think you can say it and think that you're going to do those things in the profession, but when you have these discussions on the regular, it changes those words, I hope into, action (Participant Interview, June 2018).

I had considered, in developing my research topic, that book clubs predicated upon feminism and diversity/progressivism would self-select for members who already identified with those values. (These values, after all, certainly motivated my participation.) In fact, in looking back at the first reflective journals I wrote during my research process, I was reminded that I essentially felt the same way my participants did at the advent of my research. In my first reflective journal, in response to the question “In what ways can a book club influence perceptions of feminism? Has that been your experience?” I answered:

I think my definition and perception of feminism is pretty set. That said, I have not closed myself off to influence, but rather I seek to learn from feminist framework conversation with others. The book clubs make me more attuned, I think, to recognizing inequality and the complexity surrounding it, especially since so many of our conversations about books pull from real life.

In re-reading this, I was struck by how similar my answers were to those of my participants’. I was amused that I was so blunt in thinking that “my definition and perception of feminism is pretty set.” Through my subsequent reflective journals, my stance became more nuanced. In my second reflective journal, in response to the question, “In what ways can a book club influence perceptions of diversity and progressivism? Has that been your experience?” I wrote:

Book club discussion has strong potential to broaden perceptions of diversity and progressivism. In conversation we work together to mold our own definitions, adding to them, refining piece by piece. Our conversation takes on a mosaic quality, whereby tidbits from participants stretch and strengthen our commitments to the values upon which the book clubs are founded.

In this second journal entry, I still maintained that perceptions of values could be “broadened” and “refined” rather than radically changed. Indeed, while participants generally rejected the idea that their book club participation engendered new values, they attested that it inspired new commitment to and reinforced identification with the feminist, diversity-oriented, and progressive values they largely already held. And while most members denied having fully formed conceptions of their professional identities, I maintain that the values they hold paramount will inform the development of their professional identities as they advance into their future careers.

As my data collection progressed, a convergence of the two book clubs began to occur. Because of the interconnectedness of the UHM LIS community, some participants who were initially members of only one of the book clubs became aware of—and decided to join—the other as well. More striking, though, than the degree of membership confluence, was that participants referenced the respective espoused values of each book club with increasing frequency in the meetings of both. Because the textual content and discussion for *Books by Women* and the UHM LIS Book Clubs were increasingly informed by each other’s values, the resulting framework merged their once distinct values into a new schema—a feminist diversity ethic—which recognizes the reciprocity of feminism and diversity (Bunch, 1992; O’Brien Hallstein, 1999). In addition to a feminist diversity ethic, participants also exhibited a rejection of the comfort zone, an embrace of empathic thinking, and a commitment to progressivism and critical librarianship.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah*—one of the LIS Book Club texts—provides a perfect cornerstone to the discussion of the simultaneous processes of blending between book clubs and coalescence between values. *Americanah* is the story of the young and in love Ifemelu

and Obinze, who each depart military-ruled Nigeria for the West. Ifemelu moves to the United States, where she confronts what it means to be Black in America for the first time. When it becomes impossible for Obinze to join her post-9/11, he moves into a dangerous, undocumented life in the United Kingdom. Fifteen years after facing their respective struggles on their own, the two reunite and rediscover their love for one another and their mutual passion for their Nigerian homeland.

Though Ifemelu and Obinze are represented with near equal consideration in the book, our discussion and sentiments in the LIS Book Club meeting centered on Ifemelu, the character who clearly resonated most with the group. Ifemelu's first-person blog posts and third-person omniscient observations revealed an acute and profound perspective on intersectional identity in America: she is Black, she is a woman, she is an immigrant; and she illustrates how all these identities present challenges both on their own and in conjunction in a country that privileges none of them. As Selma, in our discussion summarized, Adichie "covered so much that it could have been multiple books. Not even with the same characters. There could have been a whole book that was just about microaggressions, and then a whole book that was just about immigration...They all fit together." *Americanah* fuses discussions of race, ethnicity, gender, and immigrant status to show that identity is multifaceted and intersectional, and can be self-constructed, imposed from outside, or more likely, both.

Each of the values embraced by book club members share a critical theory perspective as their backbone. Just as with *Americanah*, it is difficult, in many ways, to parse this collection of values into separate threads, as they all stem from a core understanding of inclusivity and intersectionality. Together, the book clubs' collection of key values will likely act as a guide for participants' thought and action as they become professionals in the world of LIS. The following

sections summarize and highlight instances of participants expanding, refining, applying, and exercising the collection of values comprising their ethics as they relate to librarianship.

*A Feminist Diversity Ethic*

The term “diversity” can be tricky. Some participants put forth that the more frequently the term is used, the less it means. When Penelope and I were discussing the concept in our interview, she related it to her learning from an LIS class:

We were talking about this [in class]; how diversity becomes this catch phrase that starts to lose its meaning the more you use it. So when we're talking about diversity, we're talking about anything outside of what is—what has been—a mainstream perspective; so like cisgender, white, straight, male gaze, I guess. It's such a wide all-encompassing thing for such a tiny word (Participant Interview, June 2018).

Balderrama (2000) confluentally challenges us to define our interests in diversity. She asks:

Are we bored or dissatisfied with and diminished by homogeneity? Do we want to mirror the latest demographics? We must be able to articulate why we in our profession would want someone distinct from us to work with us, not for us. To work alongside us, not beneath us. To create with us, not duplicate with us (p. 198).

Selma refused to settle for a single, final definition of diversity, instead emphasizing the need for the term to be encompassing and flexible: “I feel like you need to take a kaleidoscopic view of it because there are so many ways to be diverse that I don't think it can be just reduced to one trait or characteristic” (Participant Interview, June 2018).



Participants similarly found that their book club membership (in either or both BBW and the LIS Book Club) challenged them to develop more inclusive conceptions of feminism. bell hooks argues:

Feminism, as liberation struggle, must exist apart from and as a part of the larger struggle to eradicate domination in all its forms. We must understand that patriarchal domination shares an ideological foundation with racism and other forms of group oppression, and that there is no hope that it can be eradicated while these systems remain intact (1989, p. 22).

A feminist diversity ethic aligns with hooks' assertion, and maintains an embrace of diversity as an effective means of subverting and negating oppressions. I define a feminist diversity ethic as a form of intersectional feminism that values experiential knowledge, embrace of the multifaceted nature of identity, respectful communication, caring, and orientation towards social justice as means of dismantling interlocking systems of oppression. While the feminist BBW Book Club contributed a focus particularly on gender and sex, the diversity and progressivism-oriented LIS Book Club contributed a focus on cultural paradigms and identity, thereby bolstering the intersectional framework with which participants interpreted feminist and diverse textual content.

When I asked Selma whether she felt that her definition of feminism had morphed throughout her book club participation, she began to discuss how she often found her conceptions of feminism challenged, with the result that her thinking on feminism had become more fluid. One of BBW's books, *Book of Joan*, by Lidia Yuknavitch, is a dystopian science fiction novel that questions and problematizes the significance of sex and gender. In the book, following near destruction of the Earth, the surviving humans have become entirely sexless being

whose skin has blanched to a nearly transparent white, and who live suspended above the desecrated planet on a platform called CIEL. About *Book of Joan*, which Selma described as “one of, if not the most, overtly feminist books that we've read,” Selma, surprised at her own reaction, relayed:

That was the book I hated...I would say that I think it challenged my view of feminism, because I'm still not sure why I was so averse to that book. I guess it's made me seek out different viewpoints than my own...I know we all agree on basic things, like we are all feminist, but I guess it's made me more aware of the possibility for gray area within it, or nuance within it (Participant Interview, June 2018).

On the effect of the narrative's problematizing of sex and gender, Selma continued:

It made me think way more about trans stuff. Trans people, trans rights, trans issues and trans portrayal in media. I've definitely encountered that and thought about it more from this book club...than probably ever before (Participant Interview, June 2018).

Following *Book of Joan*, BBW opted to read two books in conjunction for a subsequent meeting. The first was Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater*. In this autobiographical novel, (“Biography,” n.d.), Ada, a human girl, is born with spirit entities, who are cognizant and very alive within her mind. As she grows up, these entities crystallize into more powerful selves who assume increasing amounts of control over Ada. Through her protagonist, Ada, Emezi reveals much of herself. We learn that Emezi does not identify just as human, but also as *Ogbanje*, an *Qdĩnanĩ* term for a malicious spirit that plagues the human family into which it is born. In her essay entitled “Transition,” (2018) Emezi writes:

I exist separate from the inaccurate concept of gender as a binary; without the stricture of those categories, I don't even have to think about my gender. Alone, there's just me, and

I see myself clearly...Speaking to other people, though, requires channeling who or what I am into language they can understand. "I'm trans," I explained. "And I've had a breast reduction, so hormones would reverse that."

BBW's tenet of inclusivity inspired members to seek out authors who exist beyond the confines of a binary understanding of gender and beyond traditional identities. Members relished being privy to such narrative paradigms. BBW's selection of *Freshwater* demonstrated the group's interest in being inclusive in their reading practice and discussion. For the same meeting, BBW also read *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* (2014) by Janet Mock. In this stunning memoir, transgender rights activist Janet Mock relays her story of self-empowerment. BBW members were intentional in their selection of text written by women (except for *Freshwater*) that provided diverse portrayals of women with equally diverse empowered identities.

Because participants in BBW and the LIS Book Club selected books precisely for their ability to advance conversations on feminism and diversity respectively, it was clear that they approached their individual reading practice with these ethics in mind. Then, together in meetings, participants expressed the ways in which they connected textual content to their own lived experiences, values, and ideas, and eagerly listened to one another. Starting with the basic premise of women-authored literature—as in BBW for example—ensured that members maintained an awareness of concepts of gender identity throughout their reading and subsequent conversation. As Penelope explained about reading women-authored literature in BBW:

I think it does change the discussion because we are a lot more aware of that issue going in, so when we look at the plot, we look at it from that feminist perspective and not just as "oh, I like this character. This plot is interesting"; but "what does this say about

society? And about the author who is writing it? And about how we react to these things?” (Participant Interview, June 2018).

Participants’ deliberate exploration of diverse books was then enhanced by their own multifaceted identities and diversity. In summarizing what she learned from her participation, Selma emphasized:

I have learned that I have a lot to learn. It helps that we have a diverse little group in terms of sexual orientation, age, educational background, et cetera. Those different experiences make me learn a lot and it helps me to learn why people had different reactions to books than I did. It gives me ideas or considerations I wouldn’t have or didn’t come to on my own (Participant Interview, June 2018).

Here she prized the diversity of the book club not for a surface-level representation, but because participants’ diversity impelled her towards a more comprehensive understanding of both text and her peers’ perspectives. Rather than accept surface-level conceptions of diversity, the book clubs encouraged members to advance their personal definitions of diversity, expanding and refining where necessary, so that their new thoughtful and comprehensive understandings would carry weight, engender new commitment, and likely have lasting impact in how they approach their LIS work.

For members, book club texts and their peers’ reader responses supported the strengthening of more inclusive definitions of feminism and diversity, which, in turn, bolstered their ability to critically evaluate subsequent book club texts and library resources for equitable and respectful representation of diverse demographics. In alignment with Balderrama’s assertion that “appropriate tension and constructive conflict can occur if we are willing to go through it rather than around it,” (p. 207) the book club members chose to openly engage and intellectually

wrestle with definitions of diversity and feminism. Because of this, members will likely be able to more broadly and creatively apply their emerging understandings of feminism and diversity as they relate to LIS.

Because engaging with diverse literature grants readers a window to highly variant paradigms, it can mitigate the effect of “othering,” in which individuals construct artificial boundaries between the demographics or cultures that they identify with and those with which they do not. Bossaller, Adkins, and Thompson (2010) explicate that even with our best intentions to be inclusive of diversity, thoughts and actions with this aim are often enacted “through the mores and values” of one’s own cultural paradigm (p. 33). Because it is typically so difficult to dissociate from one’s own philosophy and the experiences that inform it, this may be a near-universal challenge for those seeking to embrace a diversity ethic. Particularly relevant to LIS students in the United States, Adkins and Espinal (2004) maintain:

In the United States, the educational and other dominant institutions are geared to white, mainstream cultures. Therefore, most Americans get a grounding in the culture and knowledge of the mainstream. The cultural traditions of nondominant groups are often not taught nor understood by the majority groups (p. 54).

The book clubs embraced literature as a means of changing this. Though book club members are diverse in a number of intersectional ways—many of which place members outside the majority, dominant culture in various regards—participants nevertheless recognized that they must be proactive and persistent to see beyond their own cultural paradigms and/or that of the mainstream. Book club literature, which conveys diverse paradigms—that tells stories from diverse perspectives—enabled readers to deconstruct the artificial barriers we construct between the familiar and the unfamiliar, thereby dismantling the notion of the “Other.” Indeed, Abu-

Lughod (2008) writes that “by insistently focusing on individuals and the particularities of their lives, we may be better able to perceive similarities in all lives” (p. 27). On this topic, Penelope was especially enthusiastic about her experience reading fiction with the book clubs:

I think I read somewhere that it's easier to change views when you're looking at fiction because you empathize with the character so it's kind of like walking a mile in someone's shoes kind of thing. And as opposed to like, looking at a textbook and looking outside in, you'd be looking inside out at an issue, which I feel like maybe we should do, because that's why patrons go to the library, right?...It's easy to forget that the books aren't just like these physical objects, they're like an experience for the users. So...how can we look at the issues from the user perspective? But also, how can we use these to change things for the community from this perspective where people can empathize? (Participant Interview, June 2018).

At once, this data shows Penelope reflexively considering the influence that an intentional reading practice had upon her own ability to think empathically, and then illustrates her application of this notion to an imagined library patron community in asking how LIS professionals can effectively support a reading practice that would foster empathy and deconstruct the notion of the “Other” on a larger scale. In this and many other senses, book club reading *was* learning: book club practice *became* lived experience that would subsequently influence participants’ Weltanschauungen and their approach to LIS.

Irvin (2016) writes that we often self-identify with “surface-oriented categories” (e.g. white women, people of color), but that “in reality what simmers beneath this veneer is actually quite kaleidoscopic” (p. 152). She affirms that though our surface-level identities may be significant determinants of how we experience the world, there is much more to account for.

Literature, because of its immersive capacity, is an effective channel by which readers can learn to recognize the kaleidoscopic nature of our distinct and varied paradigms and identities, and to re-write the widely internalized tendency to judge based on surface-level identities. *Americanah*, the LIS Book Club's second selected text, drops readers into the midst of Ifemelu's experience at the intersection of the many facets that comprise her identity. Whereas these facets may have seemed surface-level to audiences prior to engaging with the literature, *Americanah* lead book club members to intellectually and emotionally engage with each of them, encouraging members to move below the surface, to deeper and more empathic levels of understanding and appreciation of diverse identities and experiences.

In fact, when I asked Selma in our interview whether she felt that her participation in both book clubs could influence the way she thinks of diversity, she connected the question to a prior book club discussion, responding:

I think we kind of talked about this at the book club last time, actually with Romy, because fiction especially can be a tactic, like a Trojan horse for social issues. Because if you read fiction, I think fiction is all about empathizing with people basically, or not even empathizing because I don't even know if you need to be able to empathize with someone to be able to respect their position or respect their perspective. Or not even respect but acknowledge their perspective. And all of those are good things to try to do...I do think that reading, even if it was solitary, can sort of stretch your own boundaries (Participant Interview, June 2018).

Thinking deeply about literature, conversation, and LIS through a diversity focus strengthens students' commitment to actualizing diversity in their subsequent careers. As Romy attested, approaching LIS with a diversity framework is "encouraging us to think more critically

about all aspects of librarianship, and how we can make sure that we are being inclusive and promoting diversity” (Participant Interview, June 2018).

By acknowledging their diverse backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge—and creating an environment that supported others in doing so—book club members established an inclusive atmosphere that resisted and countered preferential treatment of those in the mainstream, dominant culture and enacted a learning environment that instead privileged diverse experiential knowledge.

Furthermore, in my individual interviews with participants, they each emphasized the value they placed on the lived experience of their fellow book club members. By firstly embracing diverse and inclusive textual content and then raising reader response informed by experiential knowledge to the forefront, both BBW and the LIS book clubs actively privileged non-dominant, non-mainstream ways of knowing and methods of knowledge production. Moreover, the book clubs embodied a feminist ethic in their non-hierarchical and egalitarian design (Accardi, 2013). In this alternative, co-curricular learning space, participants positioned one another as equals sans the power dynamics inherent to the traditional classroom. They unfailingly exhibited an honoring and encouraging of one another’s voices—a practice which enabled members to recognize one another’s multifaceted identities, thereby perpetuating inclusivity. The book club paradigm, through its valuing of lived experiences, supported a community in which members saw one another as holistic, multidimensional, and complex beings.

Participants will likely extend their enhanced capacity to view others holistically and to relate to them non-hierarchically to their future colleagues and patron communities. The exploration and practice of a feminist diversity ethic throughout members’ book club



participation has likely sculpted the modus operandi with which they will approach their future LIS careers.

*Critical Librarianship: Rejection of the Comfort Zone*

Both the BBW and the LIS Book Clubs displayed an amazing capacity to consider content that made members uncomfortable. I drew a parallel to Kooy's (2003) experience studying book clubs in which her participants' "interpretive frameworks are modified, expanded, and realized—particularly through conflict, disagreement and contrasting perspectives" (p. 12). In the case of the book clubs, these conflicts—less aggressive and more engaging—were supplied to participants via both texts and fellow members.

BBW members unanimously expressed uneasiness in reading Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking*, as it challenged them to consider death and grief, while the LIS Book Club challenged members to confront the darker corners of their own minds when reading and discussing *Blind Spot*. As a result of going beyond their comfort zones, participants seemed to persevere through the experience to find that their comfort zones had been redefined and broadened. This had the added effect of increasing participants' empathy for those experiencing situations they would have previously evaded due to their disquieting effect. Moreover, because of engaging with unsettling topics, participants actualized an environment in which confronting one's own flaws in thinking was encouraged and supported, rather than repressed. For both book clubs, having taken such actions will likely increase members' willingness to confront intimidating mental paradigms in the future.

In *The Year of Magical Thinking*, author Joan Didion takes us through an intimate account of the year following the death of her husband, John Gregory Dunne. One of the reasons why this text is so valuable, besides its inherent beauty and intimacy, is that Didion counters the

mainstream American denial of death in relaying her intimate processes of grieving and mourning. While engaging with these topics initially made most participants uneasy, they affirmed that book club discussion seemed to level their discomfort with these topics into a shared profound appreciation that Didion invited readers to meditate on them. As Selma succinctly stated, “I wish there were more books like this because I think it’s super important just to know. This is such a private experience, normally” (Field Notes from the BBW Meeting #1, June 2018). By allowing participants to express anxieties provoked by the literature in a receptive and encouraging environment, book club discussion worked to negate participants’ fear.

Moreover, participants believed that the conspicuous change in their willingness to engage these topics would translate into an increased ability to empathize with those experiencing loss and grief. There was overwhelming agreement that our cultural norm is to feel encumbered and inconvenienced by others’ feelings of sadness, and thus to seek to avoid them. This paradigm makes processing grief, an already burdensome state, excruciating lonely. The group seemed to arrive at an agreement that they would, from the meeting forward, seek to reject our culture’s overriding negation of death and grief, believing that if we were able to accomplish this on a societal scale, our collective treatment of death would be much healthier. If grief and grieving were normalized, the process would likely be easier for those experiencing it, and those around them would better understand how to help. BBW members found an intentional reading practice to be an effective way of expanding one’s comfort zone, and thus enhancing one’s empathic capacity.

Similarly, the LIS Book Club found the challenge to critically examine their own minds, as presented by *Blind Spot*, as a channel by which to confront—and chip away at—their comfort

zones, thus eliminating invisible barriers to empathy for others. In considering this text, the solution-oriented, reflexive conversation so characteristic of the LIS Book Club considered both the individual and the group levels. The group collectively argued that just as one needs to recognize one's bias to abate it, we need to understand why we have bias to change our exclusionary thinking patterns into more inclusive ones. Selma adopted a scientific basis for understanding bias, saying that "it's the way that the brain works, because you have to learn how to operate within a system" (Field Notes from LIS Book Club Meeting #1, April 2018). Through their membership in book clubs and by engaging with texts explicitly chosen for the variant perspectives they represent, the participants sought to familiarize themselves with alternate "systems" and integrate the thinking learned in these variant systems into their own. Selma elaborated, "I think this [*Blind Spot*] is a good book for librarians because...it really comes down to exposure" (Field Notes from LIS Book Club Meeting #1, April 2018). She argued that it is "so easy to vilify what you don't know. And as soon as you can humanized something, it's just totally different" (Field Notes from LIS Book Club Meeting #1, April 2018).

Two member—Selma and Malia—who had attended the LIS meeting on *Blind Spot*, later attended the BBW meeting on *The Year of Magical Thinking*. In dialogic exchange, the two incorporated their learning from the former text into their reader response to the latter. *Blind Spot* had, at this point, become an experience for these readers, a component of the framework through which they critically interpreted ensuing literary experiences. Discussing *Blind Spot* critically and thoughtfully in the LIS meeting had likely helped them affix the text to their thinking to a degree that might not have occurred without deliberate consideration of it. In discussion of *The Year of Magical Thinking*, then, I observed an iterative process of reader

response in which one work of literature influenced participants' impressions and interpretations of the next.

After meeting to discuss *Blind Spot* in our first LIS Book Club meeting, some had bravely acknowledged their personal biases in an effort to overcome them. One participant—a member in both book clubs—previously shared that she had difficulty understanding identification with religion. She mentioned, in the context of *The Year of Magical Thinking*, that she was surprised at the religious ceremony surrounding the death of Joan Didion's husband, John Gregory Dunne. She was surprised firstly because a character she could identify with so strongly diverged from the scope of her own norm in her embrace of religious practice, and secondly, because she thought Didion presented herself as otherwise thoroughly nonreligious. *Blind Spot* may have primed her to notice when another's conviction or practice varied from her own, and to consider it reflexively and empathically, rather than judgmentally.

In *The Year of Magical Thinking*, when Dunne dies and is taken to a hospital, Didion accepts the hospital's offer of a priest to administer last rites. Didion also holds Dunne's funeral in a church—two choices Selma commented are “probably kind of innocuous” but that she herself would probably never make. In response, Malia offered that “for a lot of people, it's about the ritual and about the cultural family connections” (participant observation, May 2018). Malia was presenting an alternate explanation for Didion's motive: Didion was not necessarily religious, but rather, may have taken comfort in the ritualistic nature of these religious customs, or appreciated the opportunity to connect with Dunne's religious identity. In this exchange, Selma expressed a strong sense of identification with Didion, yet noted the difference between her own and Didion's relationship with religion. Then, Malia mediated between Selma's feelings about her rejection of religion and about Didion's momentary embrace of religion. As an

example of reader response in the social dimension, and through time, Selma interpreted her feelings about a text through the lens of her own values, which were then supplemented by contributions from another group member, based on prior learning from other literature that they had read together. Both of their contributions to the conversation had been informed by their prior reading of *Blind Spot*, which challenged them to examine their own biases more critically.

The more book club members engaged with material that made them uncomfortable, the more comfortable they became with these concepts, such as death and grieving, and the likelihood that they themselves harbored bias or “blind spots.” Establishing the practice of stepping outside of one’s comfort zone—in itself an unsettling experience—perpetuates a willingness to expand one’s social and intellectual horizons.

For example, one discussion centered around the term “feminism” and the contention that, even in contemporary times, it cannot seem to shake. Participants cited Adichie’s argument in *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) that “feminism” is an essential term that signals acknowledgement of the continuing marginalization of women in a way that the alternative term “humanism” dismisses. Selma related the discussion of controversial terminology to her experience with a friend, whom she said, did not identify as a feminist. Selma aptly explained:

I think it’s a really weird coping mechanism that’s pretty effective—at least if you’re a white woman—to not identify as a feminist, because who is in power? Not the feminists. So if you want to be able to align yourself with the most possible power that you could get...it’s actually a really smart but fucked up coping mechanism to be like, ‘I’m not part of that (Field Notes from LIS Book Club Meeting #2, June 2018).

In this example, Selma is trying to understand where an ideology totally opposed to her own comes from, and why others would embrace it. Romy volunteered herself as the perfect

example of someone who once thought this way. She shared, “I used to be scared to say that I was a feminist, but then I would espouse all these feminist ideals” (Field Notes from LIS Book Club Meeting #2, June 2018). Romy has since come into her feminist identity, but illustrated to the group her belief that to call oneself a feminist is often to “put a target on your back” (Field Notes from LIS Book Club Meeting #2, June 2018).

Romy’s story certainly supported Selma’s assessment of the refusal to call oneself a feminist an effective defense mechanism. The interaction between the two again exemplified a reader response moment in the social dimension. Selma’s thoughts on feminism were inspired by a text the group read together, and then manifested in a story of a lived experience of another participant. They each enabled the other to, in a sense, infiltrate the thinking pattern of someone else to understand their behavior or beliefs. Through this exercise, Selma’s conviction remains strong (“I think it’s way more embarrassing to be like, ‘I’m not a feminist’”), yet she had rejected an unwillingness to engage the so-called “other side” (Field Notes from LIS Book Club Meeting #2, June 2018). Instead, she used dialogue with her book club peers on both literature and lived experience to reach across the divide between her feminist pole and that of the anti-feminists—a productive means of seeking understanding.

The LIS Book Club and BBW participants fostered an empathic insightfulness among in equal measure. Not only did each group expand their own literature repertoires, but they further prompted one another to consider more deeply others’ reading choices. Just as reading or “communing” (Rosenblatt, 1960, p. 305) with a text is intensely personal and informed by one’s life experiences and outlook, so is literature selection. There are so many factors influencing how library patrons select materials that they are essentially impossible to disentangle. They include reader mood, cognitive effort required, appeal factors, exposure, and more. This entanglement

## Enacting Feminist and Critical Librarianship

makes patron selection of texts and experience within libraries an interesting and important action to look at. When book club members engaged with texts that, outside of a book club setting, they would not have chosen for themselves, they found opportunities to ruminate on each texts' characteristics. Then, in discussion of texts that participants were initially hesitant about or resistant to, those who enjoyed it were able to unfailingly convey their appreciation for it, and those who were initially opposed achieved new understanding of others' perspectives and the text's appeal factors.

### *Progressivism and Critical Librarianship*

Similarly to its effect on a diversity ethic, the LIS Book Club required participants to sculpt personal definitions of progressivism in the LIS context. It is essential for those pursuing careers in LIS to attain a deep understanding of and commitment to progressivism, or the advance of a field towards a more inclusive ideal, because as Osburn (2009) conveys, the library as an institution is society's steward of its social transcript:

The library, in concept and practice, constitutes the most distinctive technology for the conveyance of the many forces behind cultural evolution. It is the cultural technology that melds into a single function both concept and place, introspection and communication, fact and fantasy; it accommodates the motivations of both community and individual (p. 194).

And, as Bossaller, Adkins, and Thompson (2010) point out, some knowledge (and experience) is privileged above others. Librarians have an immense responsibility to document the social transcript (Osburn), and further, to propel the social transcript towards greater

inclusivity by challenging what is privileged. If librarians lose sight of their democratic ideal, Bossaller, Adkins, and Thompson explain, then:

They become agents for the reproduction of existent socio-political power structures, vested in the preservation and promotion of a particular type of cultural record, whether those records and documents exist, rather than people's access to the tools necessary to thrive in the public sphere (p. 30).

Shared conceptions of progressivism among book club members include the notion of advancing LIS towards a more ideal state founded on inclusion and diversity, mirroring Beard's assertion that "the idea of progress is both an interpretation of history and a philosophy of action" (1932, p. xl). Malia, I think, would agree with this assertion. She expressed a conviction that inclusivity and idealism are essential components of progressivism:

I think it's good to be progressive. You can't rely on what was acceptable in the past. And I think that's where feminism and diversity come into play, as that's all part of being progressive. And also it's about how you do business; so including populations that you might have tried to exclude before; the way you think about services and people. I think all of that is progressivism. I guess it just means not being afraid not to be old school (Participant Interview, July 2018).

Members' conception of progress found its corollary in the rejection of neutrality. Romy stated, "I think that 'progressive' means that you're accepting that librarians can never be neutral and you're advocating for equality [and] justice in every aspect of your work" (Participant Interview, June 2018). Selma's comments in our interview echoed Romy's. Selma explained that in librarianship, "everyone takes a stance," whether they are aware of it or not, and that an embrace of a progressive philosophy means that one acknowledges their subjectivity and decides



to take “a proactive stance” to enact social justice through one’s work (Participant Interview, June 2018). Penelope similarly shared that the goal of progressivism, in her mind, is simply to “progress the field” towards greater inclusivity and diversity (Participant Interview, June 2018).

Romy touted the universality of progressivism, a philosophy that in its simplest form, advocates for solutions to identified problems. She countered the notion that progressivism is necessarily political (and thus, potentially polarizing):

I think a lot of people think that it's political—like it's a political word, so if you're a progressive librarian then you must be political, or you must be a radical, or all these other things. I don't agree with that because, well, for me it's hard because I *am* super social justice-oriented and I am a socialist radical left-wing person, but I think that when it comes to professionalism and librarianship, “progressive” just means advocating for equality and justice for everyone in librarianship (Participant Interview, June 2018).

Romy emphasized that the goals of progressivism should not be controversial when she remarked that they align with the ALA Code of Ethics. Progressivism, she and the other book club members felt, should be universally supported. Selma, a member of both book clubs, connected her learning in the LIS Book Club to the literature of the BBW Book Club, inserting the philosophy of progressivism explored intentionally in the former into the latter:

Some of the books that we read in Books by Women—actually maybe all of them now that I think about—it have had some sort of stance on social issues...Like the book for today [*A Darker Shade of Magic* by V. E. Schwab]. I thought it was feminist in that there were two protagonists [one woman, one man]. I think they're equal protagonists, in my opinion, the two main characters. And in my opinion it's not like, ‘look at this—there's a woman who is also a main character.’ It's just like its natural they're both even but they're

different and unique...They're both just good, strong characters who are both protagonist who are both complicated...So even that, to me, is a progressive stance. Unfortunately. I don't want it to be, though. I wish that was normal. That's what we're trying to *get* to be normal (Participant Interview, June 2018).

The intentional exploration of progressivism through literature and dialogue encouraged students to think more deeply about the concept and the ways they can foster it in their LIS work. Participants are likely to embody the philosophy born of such efforts in their LIS careers as a result of participation in communities of practice dedicated to advancing progressive thinking on the individual and group levels. Already as my data collection continued, I witnessed increased applications of a progressive ideal to subsequent literature and dialogue.

### *Reflexive Inquiry*

Just as I observed my study participants become more inclined to practice reflexive inquiry—and more skilled at it—I felt myself develop this ability with and alongside them through the process of this research. In a constructivist acknowledgement of my subjectivity as a researcher, I sought to triangulate and substantiate my findings in this study by engaging in a praxis that required me to reflexively consider the ways in which I interpreted my data. As with any new skill, I felt this become more natural and fluent over time. I sought to accomplish this through a process of reflective journal writing, in which, once per month, I responded to the same questions that I asked my participants during interviews. This practice enabled me to examine my reflections alongside my participants', and to evaluate how my responses and perspectives evolved through the experience of data collection and analysis.

It was also critical to align my writing practice with my values in such a way that I incorporated myself into the text of this thesis, or wrote myself into it. In discussion of adopting the humanistic techniques of writing, Abu-Lughod (2008) says in the introduction to her ethnography of Bedouin women: “I have not shied away from leaving traces of myself throughout. I assume, however, that readers are less interested in me than in the stories I tell, and so I have tried not to be intrusive” (p. 29). In my writing, I have sought to follow a similar path. It is only fair that as the writer, I am earnest in showing the reader that the assertions in this work—all the choices I made (both conscious and unconscious) about what to include in these pages—come from an opinionated, subjective being. Abu-Lughod assures us that “a story is always situated; it has both a teller and an audience. Its perspective is partial (in both senses of the word), and its telling is motivated” (p. 15). Accordingly, I have never censored myself out of my written accounts of participant observation. I have also referred to my reflective journaling in order to illustrate my thought process and ground my assertions within my evolving paradigm. I agree with Accardi, who writes that “the use of the first person destabilizes the centrality of the patriarchal modes of knowledge production that privilege neutrality, objectivity [...]” (2013, p. 5). My positionality is motivated by my own feminist values.

I also feel impelled to note that in ethnographic participant observation, the researcher *engages* in the same processes that they observe, the same processes that their participants are experiencing. In an effort to fairly represent and situate my claims, I am forthcoming about the possibility that my role as participant observer strengthened book club member’s professional value formation, simply because I asked them to think about and articulate convictions developed in and through book club membership. I maintain that through participation in intentioned book clubs, in which participants collectively ruminated on and verbalized valued

stances to one another, that value internalization would still have occurred without my presence, but that my research role may have made these processes more explicit.

Finally, through the focused, intentional exploration of the ideals central to BBW and the LIS Book Club, I noticed a bolstered commitment to feminism and critical librarianship within my own thinking, and I came to be able to more creatively apply feminism and critical theory to my LIS philosophical stance and professional identity formation. I am changed by my experience in this research—for the better—just as, I believe, my participants are.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

Ballard's (1936) position on the value of books is timeless in its relevancy. He states: Books must be regarded as spiritual forces, not merely as physical materials. Indeed educators now admit that their chief duty is to arouse the curiosity of students with respect to social interactions and social values and to train them to satisfy that curiosity through the use of such intellectual tools as books, libraries and laboratories (p. 230).

The participants in this study were proactive in feeding their curiosity, as Ballard says, through exploration of intellectual tools—books and collaborative inquiry. Working together, as opposed to independently, enabled participants to contextualize their textual learning within the lived experiences and perspectives of one another, which in turn, went on to influence the perspectives through which participants assimilated new learned material. The books and the conversations that emerged from and about them within book club discourse *became* lived experience.

Through this lived experience, participants explored, negotiated, and enacted feminist and critical librarianship ideals. While critical librarianship encourages a continuous praxis, feminism grounds this praxis in understandings of intersectionality, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Critical librarianship prompts adherents to question, transform, and improve the beliefs and practices of their institutions, cultures, and social circles; and, moreover, to reflexively examine their own thinking about professional identity and practice. In perfect complement, feminism ensures that inclusion and equity remain the persistent focus of this critical questioning stance. Integration of feminism and critical librarianship in the LIS setting translates into thought and action aimed at dismantling systems of hegemony and inequality by actively choosing advocacy, rather than perpetuating such systems by upholding the status quo.

In my view, coming from a critical, reflective lens that is framed by feminist and critical theory, LIS, in its full authenticity, position its professionals as socially active public service advocates who empower themselves and their communities through access to information and information literacy.

In this study, participants empowered themselves and one another through their value of experiential knowledge, embrace of the multifaceted nature of identity, and respectful communication that rendered mutual support. Because the book club members honored one another's voices, they were able to learn much more than they would have in solitary study, and were able to adjust their thinking to accommodate new perspectives—such as when Selma sought to empathize with Joan Didion's religious practice in the BBW discussion of the *Year of Magical Thinking*, and when Penelope found herself incorporating the “super feminist perspective” of another participant into her own interpretations of book club texts (Participant Interview, June 2018). This accommodation of new viewpoints reinforced the knowledge that perspective is infinitely diverse, and that we can gain positive understandings from this diversity if we continue to seek it out. Through the process of data collection, I observed the book clubs become well-established communities of practice that, through a collective sense of empowerment, achieved great success in collaboratively building professional knowledge and strengthening commitment to feminism, diversity, and progressivism as building blocks for librarian identity. Much like the book club texts, every participant became an invaluable information resource to their peers.

This research was successful in establishing thorough explanations for the ways in which LIS book clubs foster the formation of supportive communities of emerging LIS professionals, and the ways in which these book clubs (as communities of practice) contribute to professional

knowledge. This research was also successful in illuminating the generative, constructive, and constitutive effects of framing reading and discussion of texts through the lenses of feminism, diversity-orientation, and progressivism. Beyond meeting these research goals, the experience of research was immeasurably valuable for me as both LIS student and emerging LIS professional.

The practical learning I accomplished through the processes of research topic development, data collection and analysis, and coding and writing, is invaluable, as were the ways my own thinking and identity evolved through my research. Because this research was such an immersive experience for me, I was able to carve out a sense of my own professional identity, which certainly contains a feminist diversity ethic at its core. Part of this ethic dictates that my perspectives and ethics will continue to evolve; I expect to change through time and experience, and I look forward to this process.

Though my research enabled me to glean a thorough understanding of my own professional identity and of participants' professional values, my data did not allow me to form significant conclusions about participants' professional identities. I found the concept of "identity" to be complex, intricate, and subjective because of the variance in what participants divulged about their own conceptions of their professional identities in interviews. Thus, it was difficult to draw definitive conclusions about exactly what LIS professional identity is or can be.

Indeed, undoubtedly it is a challenging "ask" to formulate a cogent explanation of one's identity on-the-spot in an interview. I would have likely achieved richer answers to questions on identity in my interviews if I had forewarned participants about the topic and asked them to reflect on the idea before interviewing them. I admit that I wanted to be able to say that the book clubs sculpted LIS professional identity; but my data does not allow such a definitive claim. Realizing this impossibility was a challenge because it required me to disentangle my hopes for

this project from my critical interpretation of the data. My reflective journaling practice was essential in helping me to recognize and filter out my personal bias, and it became an important self-teaching tool for me as student and researcher.

Additionally, an element of my study design that inhibited my ability to make broader claims regarding value and identity formation was the commonality of values among the participant groups: they were all pro-woman, pro-diversity, pro-reading people. While my research illustrates that book club participation can strengthen shared group values, the data does not speak toward whether book clubs can engender entirely new values among participants.

To balance the potential effect of the “echo chamber” (Field Notes from LIS Book Club Meeting #2, June 2018) that my participants may have had upon one another, future studies could explore book clubs comprised of LIS students or librarians who identify with highly divergent values. It would be enriching to gain a better understanding of how book club texts and discussion might enable participants to find common ground with those who embrace values contradictory to their own, or might adopt completely new values. Abu-Lughod (2008) says:

Anyone interested in working against...hierarchizing must seek ways to undermine the essentialized notion of “cultures” different from ours and peoples separate from us. There are surely many ways to do this, but in this book I have sought to “write against culture” by working against generalization. Telling stories, it has seemed to me, could be a powerful tool for unsettling the culture concepts and subverting the process of “othering” it entails (p. 13).

Contemporary ideological polarization in the United States and abroad and the increasing occurrence of echo chambers now commonplace among social media and news outlets is indeed contributing to a process of “othering” by individuals who increasingly find themselves on the



poles of an array of ideological spectrums. Because narratives “write against culture,” like Abu-Lughod says, interactive, collaborative “talking story” counteracts the process of “othering,” thereby enhancing understanding, appreciation, and empathy even among divided groups. Book clubs present a potentially highly effective way to build peace and understanding by fostering curiosity and communication. I hope that readers find my thesis convincing evidence of the benefits of book club practice for LIS pre-service, para- and degreed-professionals, and agree that book clubs deserve further exploration as potential peace and community building tools for librarianship.

Through exploration of the relationship between LIS book clubs and participants’ community, professional knowledge, and identity formation, this research contributes to the field of LIS by specifically illuminating participation in book clubs as an avenue by which pre-service LIS professionals can collaboratively build and reinforce community, knowledge, and professional value formation, and moreover, enact the values of feminism, progressivism, and a diversity ethic towards a holistic professional identity formation and practice. This research demonstrates that book club participation is an immensely empowering experience for LIS professionals. Feminist- and diversity-focused book clubs inspire and hone the critical thinking skills and commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion so essential to the service and advocacy orientation of the LIS profession.

This study also shows that book clubs teach LIS students in ways that complement and supplement their LIS classroom pedagogy: book clubs provide an immersive learning experience in which participants at once explore and enact their most prized professional values. They also challenge participants to learn and develop empathic thinking—a skill difficult to relay with traditional teaching models. The BBW and UHM LIS book clubs were communities of practice

where cognitive work masqueraded as fun. I concede: it *was* fun. In fact, my research demonstrates that “fun” is an essential element of LIS professional value formation and ongoing professional development. Fun facilitates ease in learning by relieving some of the pressure of intellectual labor; and by encouraging practitioners to adopt continuous learning practice because it is enjoyable, and therefore, easy to return to. *Fun* makes professional learning and development requisite for LIS lifelong learning.

This study moreover points to specific factors that enabled the success and longevity of book clubs. BBW and the LIS Book Club were remarkable for their lack of interpersonal conflict, which is, anecdotally, a common occurrence within many book clubs (Kaufman, 2008). During my research period, one participant excused herself from a meeting because she felt overwhelmed by schoolwork and was not especially interested in that meeting’s book choice; but it was much more common that members wanted to attend despite busy schedules, and despite whether or not they thought they would enjoy that meeting’s book. In fact, some participants seemed even more eager to meet when they had disliked a book, because they were curious to see what their peers had to say about it.

Both book clubs were remarkably successful in fostering continued and consistent membership and copacetic interpersonal relationships for several reasons. First, most of the participants would identify, I believe, as intensive readers. Because of the substantial amount of books that many of them read on their own, I believe they viewed book club texts as welcome additions to their already hefty repertoires, rather than burdensome “extras” that would detract from a limited time they might have allotted for pleasure reading. Secondly, the BBW practice, in which members selected books on a rotating basis, and the LIS Book Club practice, in which members voted for a final book choice (out of a few selections put forth by members), likely

mitigated any power struggles that might have otherwise arisen over book choice and have been cause for interpersonal conflict. Finally, because book club members were connected at once through their book club communities and at the same time through their educational and professional communities, they knew they could expect to see a lot of one other, both in the LIS Program and after they had graduated. This may have provided participants with motivation to strive for friendly relations. To be clear, I think book club participants would have been friendly and caring even without their integration into the LIS community, though this factor may have provided an extra reason to act according to a caring ethos.

Overall, this study makes a strong case for the benefits of librarian engagement in book clubs. Book clubs comprised of LIS students and professionals—within or across organizations—could encourage collaboration and teamwork, could focus critical and creative thinking on supporting positive progress, could empower participants, and could enable them, in turn, to more effectively empower their communities.

BBW and the LIS Book Club fostered networks of community and support among emerging LIS professionals; complemented and supplemented LIS classroom pedagogy, thereby contributing to member professional learning and knowledge; and contributed to the development of members' personal and professional values and philosophy. The feminist diversity ethic embraced in both BBW and the LIS Book Club enabled student participants to explore, negotiate, expand, and refine their understanding of many values crucial to an inclusive librarianship practice. Throughout the book club discussions, the pattern of earnest, self-critical disclosure and solution-oriented reflexivity occurred repeatedly to encourage and reinforce the processes of community, knowledge, and value formation. Moreover, participation in these two book clubs represented an enactment of the values members sought to explore through text and

conversation. Participants enacted a feminist stance by valuing lived experience and one another's voices. Members embodied a diversity ethic in their intentional selection and exploration of diverse literature and by contributing their own perspectives. They achieved progressivism by proactively collaborating to enhance their ideals both within their own minds and within the field of LIS. As Williams (1981) so clearly articulates:

To take a meaning from experience, and to try to make it active, is in fact our process of growth. Some of these meanings we receive and re-create. Others we make for ourselves, and try to communicate. The human crisis is always a crisis of understanding: what we genuinely understand we can do. (p. 338)

In their intention to advance the field of LIS to a more ideal state, the BBW and the LIS Book Club participants experienced a parallel within their own thinking. In their attempts to make the field more progressive, they were driving themselves to a more progressive frame of mind. What they came to understand, they then enacted. Members explored thoroughly within their book clubs and will continue to do so with open minds, I believe, in their future practice and *praxis*, as professional librarians.

## References

- Abu-Lughod, L. (2008). *Writing women's worlds: Bedouin stories*. Berkeley, CA: University of California.
- Accardi, M. T. (2013). *Feminist pedagogy for library instruction*. (Series on gender and sexuality in information studies; number 3). Sacramento, CA: Library Juice.
- Adichie, C. N. (2014). *We should all be feminists*. New York, NY: Fourth Estate.
- Adkins, D., & Espinal, I. (2004). The diversity mandate: Strides have been made since 1995, but LIS has a way to go to make librarianship look like the general population. *Library Journal*, 129(7), 52-54.
- Au, K. H. (1998). Social constructivism and the school literacy learning of students of diverse backgrounds. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 30(2), 297-319.
- Balderrama, S. R. (2000). This trend called diversity. *Library Trends*, 49(1), 194-214.
- Ballard, L. V. (1936). *Social institutions*. New York, NY: Appleton Century.
- Banaji, M. R., & Greenwald, A. G. (2013). *Blind spot: The hidden biases of good people*. New York, NY: Delacorte.
- Beach, R., & Yussen, S. (2011). Practices of productive adult book clubs. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 55(2), 121-131.
- Beard, C. A. (1932). Introduction. In Bury, J. B. *The idea of progress: An inquiry into its origin and growth* (pp. ix-xl). New York: Macmillan.
- Bossaller, J., Adkins, D., & Thompson, K. M. (2010). Critical theory, libraries and culture. *Progressive Librarian*, (34), 25-38.
- Childress, C., & Friedkin, N. (2012). Cultural reception and production. *American Sociological Review*, 77(1), 45-68.

Chu, H. (2015). Research methods in library and information science: A content analysis.

*Library and Information Science Research*, 37(1), 36-41.

Connaway, L. S., & Powell, R. R. (2010). *Basic research methods for librarians (Libraries and information science series)*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139-167.

Dewalt, B. R., & Dewalt, K. M. (2010). *Participant observation: A guide for fieldworkers*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira.

Emerson, R., Fretz, Rachel I, & Shaw, Linda L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (Chicago guides to writing, editing, and publishing). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.

Emezi, A. (n.d.). Biography. Retrieved from <https://www.akwaeke.com/biography>

Emezi, A. (2018). Transition. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2E1s4wE>

Fajardo, A. (2010). Book clubs: Not just for public libraries. *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 17(1), 65-69.

Freire, P. (2000 [1970]). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.

Goodman, V. (2011). Applying ethnographic research methods in library and information settings. *Libri*, 61(1), 1-11.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Irvin, V. (2016). Gazing the diversity stance in North America: Bringing practitioner inquiry into the LIS classroom. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*, 57(2), 151-160.

Irvin Morris, V. (2012). *Reading in mirrors: Using street literature to facilitate practitioner inquiry with urban public service librarians* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (3538166)

Irvin Morris, V. (2014). *Reference: Tried, true, and new*. [Webinar]. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2DBwUEq>

Iser, W. (1980). *The act of reading: A theory of aesthetic response*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins.

King, A., & Clark, S. (2018, June 17). "The 2017 VIDA count."  
<http://www.vidaweb.org/the-2017-vida-count/#Highlights>

Kooy, M. (2006). *Telling stories in book clubs: Women teachers and professional development*. NY: Springer Science+Business Media.

LaGarde, J., & Winner, M. C. (2012). Level up book club. *Knowledge Quest*, 41(2), 46-49.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2010). *Practical research: Planning and design* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

Lyons, B., & Ray, C. (2014). The continuous quality improvement book club: Developing a book club to promote praxis. *Journal of Adult Education*, 43(1), 19-21.

Mellon, C. A. (1986). Understanding library use from the standpoint of the user: Naturalistic inquiry for library research. *Journal of Educational Media and Library Sciences*, 23(4), 348-364.

- Morris, V., Hughes-Hassell, S., Agosto, D. P., & Cottman, D. T. (2006). Street lit flying off teen fiction bookshelves in Philadelphia public libraries. *Young Adult Library Services*, 5(1), 16–23.
- Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Osburn, C. (2009). *The social transcript: Uncovering library philosophy* (Beta Phi Mu monograph). Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.
- Polleck, J. (2010). Creating transformational spaces: High school book clubs with inner-city adolescent females. *High School Journal*, 93(2), 50-68.
- Polleck, J. (2011). Adolescent literature book clubs: A forum for cultivation of peer relationships with urban adolescent females. *The ALAN Review*, 39(1), 76-93.
- Pradl, G. M. (1996). *Literature for democracy: Reading as a social act*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook-Heinemann.
- Rainey, E. (2017). Disciplinary literacy in English language arts: Exploring the social and problem- based nature of literary reading and reasoning. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 52(1), 53-71.
- Rosenblatt, L. (1938). *Literature as exploration*. New York, NY: Noble and Noble.
- Rosenblatt, L. (1960). Literature: The reader's role. *The English Journal*, 49(5), 304-310, 315-316.
- Scharber, C., Melrose, A., & Wurl, J. (2009). Online book clubs for preteens and teens. *Library Review*, 58(3), 176-195.
- Smith, M. W. (1996). Conversations about literature outside classrooms: How adults talk about books in their book clubs. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 40(3), 180-86.



Style, E. (1988). Curriculum as window and mirror. <https://bit.ly/2O7kQyt>

Sumara, D. (1994). Resisting the tourist gaze: Literature reading as dwelling. *The English Journal*, 83(8), 41-46.

Sumara, D. (1996). *Private readings in public: Schooling the literary imagination*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers.

Trott, B., Beard, D., & Thi-Beard, K. V. (2008). Rethinking the book: New theories for readers' advisory. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 47(4), 331–335.

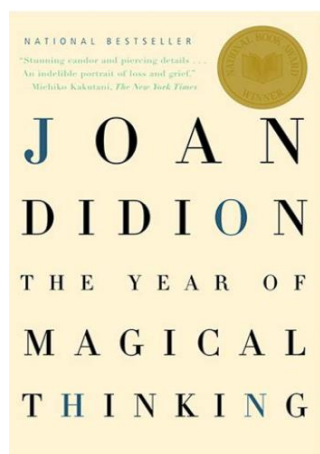
Vygotsky, L., & Cole, M. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.

Williams, R. (1981). *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*. New York, NY: Columbia.

Wyatt, N. (2008). Keeping up with genres. *Library Journal*, 133(18), 30-33.

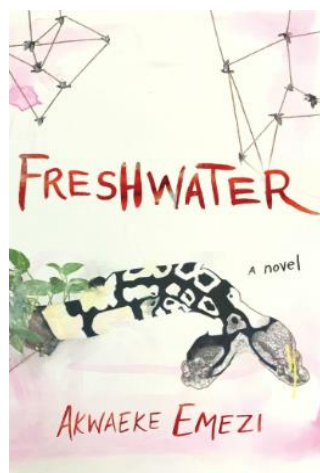
## Appendix I – Book Club Annotated Bibliography

### Books by Women Book Club Books



**Didion, J. (2007). *The year of magical thinking*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.**

In this nonfiction text, Didion shares an intimate account of the year following the death of her husband. In her story, Didion counters the mainstream American approach to the denial of death by relaying her processes of grieving and mourning. She invites readers to meditate on these topics as she herself ruminates on memories of her partner and the implications of his death. Didion is a writer: this book is how she copes.

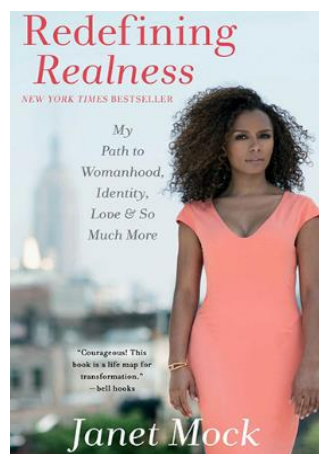


**Emezi, A. (2018). *Freshwater*. New York, NY: Grove Press.**

Ada is a girl born with spirit entities in her mind. As she grows up, these entities crystallize into more powerful selves who assume increasing amounts of control over Ada. Though she uses “she/her” pronouns, Ada does not identify as a woman, but rather as *Ogbanje*, an *Qdĩnanĩ* term for a malicious spirit that plagues the human family into which it is born. In this semi-autobiographical novel, Emezi teaches us how immensely complex identity formation can be.

**Mock, J. (2014). *Womanhood, Identity, Atria*.**

Transgender rights up multiracial, poor, including Hawai‘i. vulnerabilities she identity. She relays challenges of being a misunderstood her personal history She encourages readers their own identities.



***Redefining Realness: My Path to Love & So Much More*. New York, NY:**

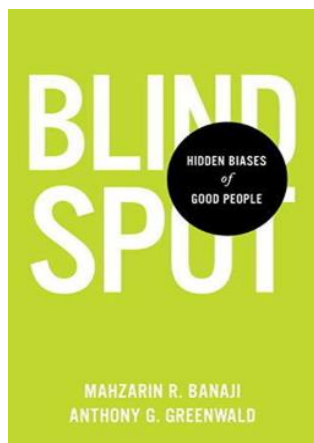
activist Janet Mock tells her story of growing and trans across several geographic regions, Despite the unique challenges and faced, Mock emerges with a self-empowered powerful insight on the experiences and member of a marginalized and largely population, all the while taking care to make accessible through straightforward language. to be unapologetic and “real” by embracing



**Schwab, V. E. (2015). *A darker shade of magic*. New York, NY: Tom Doherty.**

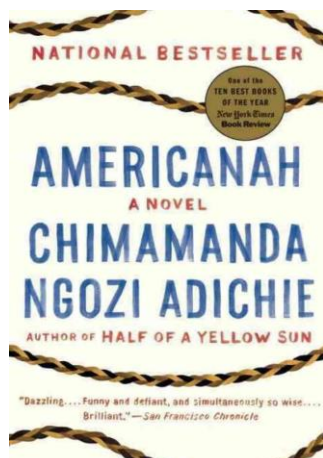
In this fantasy novel, there is not one London but four, each within its own parallel, yet varied world. Kell is from the magical Red London, and he is one of the last *Antari*—a magician who can travel between these worlds. Delilah Bard is from the dreary, magicless Gray London, and she craves nothing more than adventure. The two are complex, complementary characters who come to rely upon each other for companionship and survival through their misadventures.

**UHM LIS Book Club Books**



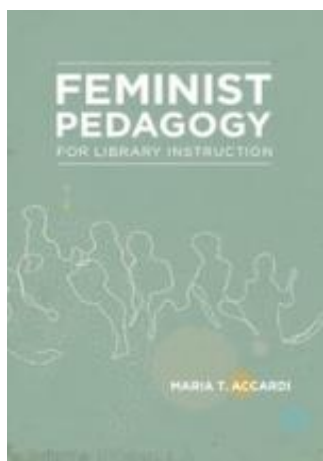
**Banaji, M. R., & Greenwald, A. G. (2013). *Blind spot: The hidden biases of good people*. New York, NY: Delacorte.**

Psychologists Mahzarin R. Banaji and Anthony G. Greenwald explore the concept of the “blind spot”—the metaphor they use to describe the portion of our minds that house the biases we remain largely unaware of. They illustrate how our perceptions of social groups can shape our judgements about members of them, even without our conscious consent. The book centers on the Implicit Association Test (available: <https://bit.ly/1m808ph>), which aims to help test takers uncover their own biases so that they can then better align their behavior with their intentions.



**Adichie, C. N. (2013). *Americanah*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.**

*Americanah* is the story of the young and in love Ifemelu and Obinze, who each depart military-ruled Nigeria for the West. Ifemelu moves to the United States, where she confronts what it means to be Black in America for the first time. When it becomes impossible for Obinze to join her post-9/11, he moves into an undocumented life in the United Kingdom. Fifteen years after facing struggles on their own, the two reunite and rediscover their love for one another and for their Nigerian homeland. Ifemelu’s narrative, especially, reveals an acute and profound perspectives on intersectional identity in America.



**Accardi, M. T. (2013). *Feminist pedagogy for library instruction*. Sacramento, CA: Library Juice.**

Accardi (re)envisioned traditional library instruction through a feminist framework that privileges collaborative and democratic means of knowledge production, values personal testimony, and raises consciousness about sexism and oppression. By teaching with feminist content and through feminist approaches, Accardi argues, librarians can immensely enrich their instructional practice in progressive ways that empower their student communities. This book draws heavily from women’s studies literature, and acts as both theoretical text and practical guidebook. Accardi is an award winning author and librarian.

## **Appendix II – Interview Protocol**

### Interview Protocol

1. What are your top three (3) reasons for participating:
  - a. In the Books by Women Book Club?
  - b. In the UHM LIS Book Club?
2. What about the book club inspires you to keep coming to meetings?
3. Can you describe the social environment at book club meetings?
4. Do you feel that participation in the book club has brought you closer to your LIS peers who are also book club members?

For Books by Women:

- a. Can you explain what feminism means to you?
- b. In your view, in what ways can a book club influence perceptions of feminism? Has that been your experience?

For UHM LIS Book Club:

- c. What does diversity mean to you?
  - d. What does progressivism in librarianship mean to you?
  - e. In your view, in what ways can a book club influence perceptions of diversity and progressivism? Has that been your experience?
5. If this book club were an LIS class, what would students learn here?
    - a. Do you learn from the books that this club reads? If so, what do you learn?
    - b. Do you learn from the other members of the book club? If so, what do you learn?

## Enacting Feminist and Critical Librarianship

- c. Do you draw connections between what you learn in this book club (if anything) and what you learn in the LIS program? Do you think that your membership in this book club complements your education in the UHM LIS Program? If so, how?
6. What attitudes or values do you think will be most essential for your career as an LIS professional?
7. Do you have a sense of professional identity?
  - a. If so:
    - i. What is your professional identity?
    - ii. Do you think that your participation in this book club has influenced how you define your professional identity?
  - b. If not:
    - i. What is your definition of librarianship?
8. For Books by Women:
  - a. Do you think you will approach your career as an LIS professional as a feminist?
  - b. Would you have given the same answer if you had not been a member of the book club?
9. For UHM LIS Book Club:
  - a. Do you think you will approach your career as an LIS professional with the ideal of diversity? The ideal of progressivism?
  - b. Would you have given the same answer if you had not been a member of the book club?